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LETTERS
ON
THE NATURE AND DURATION
OF
FUTURE PUNISHMENT;
INCLUDING
REMARKS ON THE STATE OF THE DEAD,
AND THE
VIEWS ENTERTAINED OF A FUTURE LIFE.
WITH AN INTRODUCTION,
AND NOTES,
ILLUSTRATIVE AND EXPLANATORY.

Ἅγιε δε ἄνδρες, παροδευσεν μὲν τὸν βίον τῦτον, ἐπιγεσθαι δε
πρὸς ἑτέραν ζῶν.

“ Tell us, ye Dead, will none of you, in pity
To those you left behind, disclose the secret?
Oh ! that some courteous ghost would blab it out ;
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be.”

LONDON :
LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, AND
LONGMAN ;
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK, EDINBURGH ;
AND LEWIS SMITH, ABERDEEN.

MDCCCXXXV.

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LETTERS

ON

THE NATURE AND DURATION OF
FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

ABERDEEN :
PRINTED BY D. CHALMERS AND CO.
25, ADELPHI COURT.

INTRODUCTION.

"THIS IS THE HEAVEN IN WHICH I LONG TO BE—A HOLY WORLD;
A WORLD WHERE I CAN BE TEMPTED NO MORE, AND SIN NO
MORE; WHERE I CAN BREATHE AN ATMOSPHERE THAT IS NOT
TAINTED, AND BREATHE IT WITHOUT EVER TAINTING IT;
WHERE I MAY REST FROM THE CONFLICT THAT NOW WEARIES
MY INMOST SOUL—CAST AWAY ALL WATCHFULNESS AND FEAR—
GIVE THE DESIRES OF MY HEART THEIR WIDEST AND FONDEST
RANGE—AND YET NEVER WOUND MY SPIRIT, NOR OFFEND
MY GOD."

THE writer of these pages ought, perhaps, to apologise, before embarking on the troubled waters of theological collision, for suffering any of his untutored lucubrations to swell the overgrown mass of publications on such subjects, many of which have fallen dead-born from the press. But as he writes solely to employ (if not to improve) the leisure hours of retirement, and invites none to purchase, he hopes he may without unpardonable presumption gratify the harmless (and not uncommon) weakness of giving his thoughts to the printer, albeit none may be found adventurous enough to

disturb their repose on the shelves of the bookseller, or, peradventure, inconsiderate enough to risk a shilling for a production of so dubious a character, and so forbidding an aspect.

La Bruyere has, indeed, said, that we are come into the world too late to produce any thing new ; and, accordingly, in obedience to the aphorism of that accomplished moralist, our object in the following pages has been only to collect and arrange :—for beyond the general information of a private gentleman, (who has not always sauntered in the Groves of Academus,) we have no pretensions. Like the bee hastening from flower to flower, and laying up store for the winter of the year, we have only wandered from thought to thought, and from book to book, groping for light to dissipate the shadows of death, and looking for hope beyond the confines of the grave. And our humble purpose has been served, if the result of our labors, and the reflections they suggest, be in any way calculated to soften the asperity of intolerance—to infuse more of the milk of human kindness, and the spirit of human forgiveness, into our dealings one with another—and to pour something like the oil of gladness over the hopes and fears and final destiny of man. Charity on earth growing up into love in heaven, is, we verily believe, the whole alchemy of the Gospel of Jesus ; and he that feels not the current of his affections changed by the power of its godliness, and running in the direction of an anxious benevolence of purpose, is yet, we fear, of the earth, earthy—

is yet a stranger to the swell of its mighty and subduing wisdom.

And something better, it appears to us, is due to such inquiries as we are now pursuing, than the jaded intellects of our second childhood, when we can no longer cleave to objects of sense, and to means of aggrandizement. Perhaps the drudgery of business is the doom of the generality of men—and the labour for independence is a sweet and honorable toil ; but to suffer the work of accumulation (or of worldly care of whatever description,) to fix its insatiable desires on our hearts, and to die in its harness, is to forget God, and serve the idol of a paltry and grovelling ambition ; and to live up to the last hour of existence in the bustle of worldly gains and excitement, without seriously attempting to look beyond the curtain of life, before it closes on this brief and busy scene—and then, perhaps, by some pious fraud, as it falls, to make a virtue of necessity, in the shape of repentance—is really no better than to attempt to deceive God by a contemptible juggle.

If life had been given us only to be exhausted in the pursuit of objects of sense, man had been placed on a level with the brute, without a thought beyond the lusts of the flesh, or the limits of this corporeal existence.

Yet truly in this age of mechanism, and of things tangible, when men seem disposed to apply the undivided powers of the mind to the production of the exchangeable commodities and the visible enjoyments of this life, and to throw into corresponding

distance the labors of the student of the unseen, and the philosophy of the spiritual, it certainly is out of fashion, and may appear somewhat out of joint, and not a little out of time and place, to put forth the following speculations, bearing, on the head and front of their offending title-page, a call to the investigation of things beyond the grave.

Indeed, he that feels not there is an hereafter, of overwhelming importance, may at once cast these lucubrations aside, for they embrace subjects which must be to him irksome and forbidding. He is content to enjoy the pleasures of this world (into which, he concludes, he has been somehow unaccountably introduced,) for a season, trusting to the same chapter of accidents for a place in the next ; and we possess not the power of awakening him from this sleep of indifference to his "latter end." Nay, he that believes, (or fancies he believes,) and is content with an undefined, or speculative, or hereditary creed—which is in itself inoperative, from conviction on his heart, of devotion towards God, and unproductive, in its effects, of benevolence towards his fellow-men, and of kindness towards every living thing—may follow the example of the former : a stranger to vital religion, he has entrenched himself, let him be assured, despite all flattering unction, in an evil heart of practical unbelief, insensible to the power of godliness, and barren of its blissful works. The devils believe and tremble—and we have no spell of sufficient potency to neutralize the possession.^b It is to the

man who really believes, and habitually feels, there is an hereafter of unspeakable value in which he is destined to share—the prospect of which is always before him, influencing and controlling his every thought and action^c—that these pages are addressed. And sure we are, that the economy of that eternity we investigate will appear to such an one to require his undivided attention, and to throw a ridicule over the whole scene of this world's engagements, save in as far as they affect that practical melioration of the heart, and that entire submission to the will of the Deity, which is the great lesson we have to learn in this life, and which its whole probationary drama—from the helplessness and pains of infancy, to the infirmities and childhood of age—is so obviously calculated to impress.

The writer is conscious that much of what he has said may be founded in error; but such a reader, without being strict to mark the imperfect execution of *his* labours, will not be without peculiar apology for the weakness of human reason, when venturing to traverse the regions of the unknown, and to explore the economy of that everlasting city, which hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it, for the glory of God doth enlighten it.*

If all who live must die, let us remember that the innumerable dead are living still in some form of capacity or actuality: for to this conclusion we

* See Rev. xxi. 23.

must come, whether we believe in the sleep of the soul after death, or in an intermediate state between death and judgment, or in the immediate passage of the disembodied spirit into the presence of the Eternal : whether, in short, we rely on the revelations of the Christian, or confide in the reasonings of the pagan. And we essay, with trembling steps, to approach the realms of the countless dead—to hold converse with the mighty populations of eternity—and to investigate the dealings of the Godhead in the final economy of his creation.

A discovery here (and we are answerable not for the rightness, but for the uprightness, of our endeavours,) will not leave us when this scene is done, nor can we be deprived of the advantages attending it. It will serve, in the meantime, to prepare us for the change, come when it may ; and when it does come, we shall still, perhaps, be attended by the thoughts and employments of our most serious and happiest hours, and may possibly find, when eased of our doubts by the transition consequent on the dissolution of this body, that our labour has not been in vain. Animating thought ! most glorious of all discoveries ! to be able even in fancy to penetrate the palace of the Eternal—to throw athwart the gloom of this life the bright glory of another—to raise our aspirations from this cold world of visible darkness—and to fix our serious thoughts on that other world of living light beyond the grave. Death cannot steal a march on such investigations ;^d the inquirer is ever discoursing with him—is ever on

the watch for his approach—and is prepared, not with the reckless indifference of ignorance, but under the submissive resignation of devotion, to pass the boundary of all human affairs, supported by the firm conviction, that the change can only affect the matter of this evanescent form of body ; but that the soul in its individuality must return to God : and his great care here has been to adapt it to its future condition, and to return it as perfect as possible to the Creator who called it out of the innocence of nothing, and sent it abroad for a season on the journey of this trying and fitful scene.

There are three cardinal points, of which, in the writer's opinion, were every one thoroughly persuaded, it were impossible to disregard their controlling influence ;—he means the existence of an almighty Providence of Goodness, the Immortality of the Soul, and a state of future Retribution. And it seems to him that these conclusions are made out by the efforts of natural theology, although it is admitted that the basis of our reasonings here is laid in the most inexplicable of all things to human intelligence—the existence of a cause uncaused. Yet, nothing is positively so certain, and the more so the more we consider it : for, it is abundantly clear that something cannot come from nothing^e—that there cannot be an effect without a cause—that there never was a period when nothing was, for if so, nothing could now be. Galen was led from considering the structure of the human body, and particularly of the human hand, to the inference of

a God. Every thing, in short, we see, is a demonstration of some originating cause beyond the visible—so palpable that it is impossible to suspend the conviction. Man, a microcosm of surpassing design, is himself a walking demonstration of the existence of a Deity ; and he that can resist the evidence of the unseen energy within him, the visible world without him, and the starry glories above him—perhaps, beyond all, the *motion* which actuates the whole, and which necessarily must be the effect of some power continually originating motion, (as we believe,) or communicating a continuity of motive power from the beginning (as others think,)—is beyond the reach of the inferences of a rational logic.^a

Again, without entering into any lengthened argument to prove the immortality of the soul, we may observe, that what we call death, and are apt to consider as destruction, is a mere change of condition. There is no such thing as absolute death,^f that is, destruction or annihilation, observable by us throughout the wide range of universal being. The body which we consign to the grave (or scatter to the winds, or deposit in the deep sea,) is not destroyed or annihilated,—nay, not a particle of it is lost ; but it is changed, and contributes in some other form to the purposes of the material creation. It is true the soul is not cognizable by our senses, neither is the wind palpable to our eyes, neither can we see God ; yet since nothing dies, or rather is annihilated,^g but only reverts to its elementary principle and con-

dition, we must conclude, from the whole pervading analogy, that mind forms not an exception. This argument from negation is, I conceive, conclusive, amounting to a probability—I had almost said a demonstration—which we cannot gainsay, and which he who denies combats, by opposing his own isolated opinion, founded on no observable analogy, or rather in opposition to every analogy with which we are conversant. But if we see not the soul, how are we assured of its existence? ^h By its operations. Nay, our very doubts assure us of its existence, for a nonentity could not doubt; ⁱ and when we view the cold and lifeless body, we are sure thus far, at any rate, that that which once inspired it with reason and reflection, and filled it with blessed hopes beyond the limits of earthly things—that that sublime energy which warmed it with moral feeling, and devout emotion—the Godlike spirit (be it what it may,) is not there—it is gone somewhither; for we cannot conclude (by any process of reasoning, however we may assert by any desperate plunge, in default of all argument,) that it dies—that it is extinguished utterly, in opposition to all experience, and to all analogy.

Again, of the goodness of God, no man can doubt who attends to the state of his own case. He cannot conclude that the Being who rendered him capable of any portion of happiness, might not have reversed the order, and made that happiness misery. I am not now arguing whether God might not have been better; I merely claim the unanswerable in-

ference, which no opponent can deny me, that he might have been worse, if it had so pleased him, and subjected me, a controllable and dependent object of his creation, to greater suffering and pain. Yet not only has he not done this, but he has unnecessarily, nay contradictorily, unless he intended our happiness, superadded to the exercise of every sense (excepting precautional suggestions for our safety,)^k gratification and pleasure. And in no instance do we find suffering the end in view ; where it exists, it is in connexion with some good, and is apparently precautional or remedial, or, at any rate, the evil is never pure and unmixed, and purposely of use, only and exclusively for the infliction of gratuitous misery, as it evidently would have been under the direction of a Creator of evil intention, and not indicative of benevolence. To say that there are evil and suffering in this life, is merely to complain that we are free yet imperfect creatures, and prone to error, and delinquency, and death, as all imperfect yet active creation must be in a preparatory stage. I say advisedly, preparatory, because it is essential to acknowledge this preliminary position, proved as it is beyond question from the nature of the human faculties alone, which are superior to this world's business, and which cannot here be gratified or fully developed. The accomplishment of one wish is, we all experience, but the opening of another—the solution of one problem, or the discovery of one truth, is, the learned acknowledge, but the stepping stone to further

progress in our intellectual horizon, which is ever thus expanding into the future, and ever thus evincing the ultimate destination of our capacities, in the filling up of that longing after immortality, after somewhat further, and beyond us, which is worked up in the very weft and woof of our being. The foetus, in its organization in the womb, bears not more explicit marks of an incipient stage of the future and matured body, than the human faculties enveloped in our present corporeal rind afford, of some future field for their operation in some future and matured existence emancipated from the flesh. Now, with reference to the evident tendencies and determination of things here, let us follow out the inference, and push the effects to their maturity hereafter. A state of preparation implies a state of destination and advancement suited to, and co-relative with, our progress—and this preparatory stage is, accordingly, we find, fitted to refine us beyond the power of enjoyment from the external and tangible objects of sense,¹ by the most convincing of all arguments—their utter uncertainty—their utter insufficiency if they had certainty—and lastly, their extinction, in so far as our present enjoyments are concerned, by death. It is clear, then, that this cannot be our ultimate and abiding place—that the ocean of this life cannot be the scene of our entire emancipation from sin—that here we cannot fulfil the full purposes of our being—and cannot arrive at the full developement of our rational and virtuous capacities. It is clear, therefore, that to some

futurity, to some destination, be it where and what it may, we are tending ; and thither we must look for home, for happiness and security, and the full manhood of our intellectual capabilities and moral endowments. Now, when I find in this life that man has the power of willing and of acting—of doing good or evil—I cannot but infer some consequence from voluntary conduct—that is, accountability where there is choice ; and keeping in view the attributes which reason enables me to ascribe to God, particularly his justice and goodness^m—and seeing, also, the mixed nature of things here—it is not possible to resist the conclusion, that the working of this system of means is prospective of a solution of the enigma it involves, and that the Creator must finally adjust all this economy by a result having the felt and acknowledged force of a righteous administration. With these stubborn facts and considerations before my eyes, under the irresistible conclusion that the tendencies observable here must have place somewhere—that the troubled current of human affairs, and of all things else, must ultimately subside into some permanency and order—it is impossible for me to resist the inference, that I am now on the threshold of existence only, and that the valley of death, as it closes this preliminary kaleidoscope, is the appointed avenue which opens upon scenes of real life, and by which I am destined to move on to future being ; when the plan which I have seen, evidently but in progress, will be developed, and the tendencies and

according to that which is written of purification by fire. But how long *this purification*, which is *wrought out* by fire, shall be applied, or for how many ages the sinner shall endure torments, He alone can know, to whom the Father has committed all judgment.”^c It is clear from this passage alone, that Origen supported the doctrines of the Universalists;—the remedial nature of punishment, and the eventual purification of the lapsed soul.

We have then Gregory of Nazianzus, a laborious Presbyter, and the master of St. Jerome, who has been called by some, the most learned of all the Latin fathers,—“as eminent a divine (says Dr. Calamy) as any among all the fathers.”* Gregory flourished between 326 and 389, and St. Jerome terms him a most eloquent man. He distinguishes between the fire for purifying and the fire for punishing, which last he determines to be the worm that never dieth, “*unless*, indeed, we are to interpret all these modes of suffering in a sense more merciful towards man, and worthy of God.”^d

Gregory of Nyssa, again, who was ordained about 370, positively asserts that evil must be utterly banished from the whole range of being. Evil (says he, in substance) cannot be without a will and purpose, and as all will and purpose must proceed from God, evil must be eventually abolished.^e

After Gregory we have the learned and laborious

* Calamy's Life and Times, vol. i. p. 20.

Jerome, who flourished about the year 390. Of the doctrine of hell torments, in which this eminent father acquiesced, he observes, in his commentary on Isaiah, (as it were in modification ;—and) in the true spirit of Christian humility,—“ which matter we should leave to the judgment of God, whose mercies and punishments are in weight and measure, and who alone knows whom, by what means, and for how long, he ought to punish.” ^f And we have a passage from the “City of God,” of the celebrated St. Augustine, the contemporary and friend of Jerome, and who died in the year 430, which shows that so late as his day the creed of the Universalists was not without its supporters. “ And now I find (says he) I have to do with our merciful men, and I must dispute with them peaceably,—those, I mean, who will not believe that everlasting punishment shall be inflicted on those whom the most righteous Judge shall condemn to the pains of Gehenna, or at least not on all of them, but that after certain periods, in proportion to the crime of each, they shall be delivered from their sufferings.” ^g

Indeed it has been asserted, by no mean authority, ^h that the belief of the eternity of hell torments is no part of the ancient creeds of the two first centuries, and that the stern Tertullian, who flourished towards the end of the second, is the first who makes the happiness of the good and the misery of the wicked of equal duration. Be this as it may, we have noticed some of the earliest and best

fathers of the church who have recorded their sentiments in favour of the restitution of all things ; and it ought not to be forgotten that the contrary doctrine forms no part of the Articles of the Church of England. It is said, it is true, in the Athanasian creed, “ which faith, except every man do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish *everlastingly* ;” but this leaves to the believer the benefit of the Scriptural interpretation of the word “ *everlastingly* ” in the sense his conscience and reason dictate ; and this inference is distinctly implied in the fact that, in the 42 Articles, settled in Edward the Sixth’s reign, the eternity of hell torments is asserted, but it is omitted in the 39 Articles, as they were altered and framed in the reign of Elizabeth.ⁱ Not so in the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches ; and among the Moravians the belief of the eternity of hell torments is expressly required. And although we evade the more forbidding inference in the Articles of the Church of England, it is still manifest that they require a particular faith, or rather an adherence to a particular creed, as necessary to salvation, and are therefore in so far intolerant, unless we explain the creed as implying belief in the essential articles of Christianity only.^k I do not forget that the 17th Article of the Church of England would imply that those only are saved, who “ by the everlasting purpose of God, before the foundations of the world were laid, being chosen in Christ out of mankind, are decreed by his council, secret to us, and are delivered from curse and

damnation.” But I have already given my reasons * why I reject these doctrines of election and reprobation—why I cannot see the use of God’s laws, if some are infallibly rejected, and some as infallibly saved.

“ What else (says the learned Eusebius) does the name of a Christian denote, but a man who, by the knowledge and doctrine of Jesus Christ, is brought to the practice of sobriety, righteousness, patience, fortitude, and the religious worship of the one and only God over all.”† If this opinion of this most excellent father had been preached and practised, in sincerity and truth, what a world of absurd logomachy, and unchristian persecution, had never disgraced the annals of our species !

* Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. p. 236, note n, &c.

† Lardner, vol. viii. p. 71.

LETTER III.

“ Let not that trouble you, Philopolis : For, for my part, I look upon the Christian Religion, *rightly understood*, to be the deepest and the choicest piece of Philosophy.”

More's Divine Dialogues.

“ My trembling steps, Oh ! Sybil, lead
Through the dominions of the dead.”—*Hamilton.*

THE reader will bear in mind, that many of the Fathers whose opinions we have quoted lived close to the age of the Apostles ; and a question here naturally arises,—by what means we of modern days have arrived at the knowledge of an explicit article of faith which escaped their patient and unwearied research ?

It is certainly true “ that all things necessary to be believed and practised, by all Christians, are clearly and plainly declared in the gospel ;” * and it is equally true “ that there is no visible Judge, to whose determination in matters of faith and practice, necessary to salvation, Christians are bound to submit, without examination whether these things

* Tillotson, fol. vol. 2, p. 202.

be agreeable to the doctrine of the gospel or not ;”* for “ cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.” Yet the generality seem disposed to reverse these truths, and to take Christianity as they find it, disfigured under the daubing of a particular preacher,—not as they see it painted in the graceful simplicity of Scripture.

Neither are these opinions, as to the restoration of all things, confined to the pages of some of the most celebrated of the ancient fathers : they are admitted by learned names of our modern church. Dr. Henry More, an eminent divine of the Church of England, and poet and philosopher of some celebrity, may be classed among the number ; for, as he maintained the pre-existent state of souls, and that wisdom and goodness are the chief attributes of the Deity, it is reasonable to conclude he inferred the universal restoration of all things, which, indeed, may be gathered from the following lines of his poetry :—

“ For I would sing the pre-existency
Of human souls, and live once o’er again,
By recollection and quick memory,
All that is past since first we all began.”

He goes on to invoke the “ sacred soul of Plotin dear :”

“ Tell me what mortals are ;
A spark or ray of the divinity—
Clouded with earthy fogs, y’clad in clay ;

* Tillotson, p. 203.

A precious drop, sunk from eternity,
Spilt on the ground, or rather slunk away?"

* * * *

"Shew fitly (he continues) how the pre-existent soul
Enacts and enters bodies here below,
And then *entire, unhurt*, can leave this moul."* a

The great Dr. Tillotson (whose clear and decisive exposition† of the doctrine of Transubstantiation would alone entitle him to the highest rank among able reasoners,) considered these punishments only threatened;—and that neither the justice nor the veracity of the Deity required he should execute threatenings;‡ which are never to be stretched beyond the "plain words," and which "do not seem to reach any farther than to the exclusion of *impenitent* sinners out of Heaven, and their falling finally *short* of the rest and happiness of the righteous." It is abundantly evident that the pleasantness of peace can never be the portion of sinfulness here, or of obduracy hereafter;—and to fall finally short of happiness is a very different consummation from that of suffering eternal misery in the life to come. In fine, without entangling ourselves in the controversies and recriminations of the period, we may observe, on the whole, that the Archbishop virtually refuses the doctrine of the absolute eternity of punishments, although the pith of his opinions (not always consistent) has been modified by some, and

* Campbell's Poets, vol. 4, p. 318.

† Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. p. 244, 259.

‡ See note f, let. 1.

explained away by others. In truth, the substance of all he admits in defence of the doctrine is, that the terrors of the Lord are threatened; and the drift of his reasoning is to show, that being only threatened, the justice of the Deity is not engaged to execute them.* And no man can deny that God may execute any threatening, of whatever nature, not contradictory of his attributes. Thus much we must believe, if we believe the Scriptures, that God may eternally punish,—that is, make punishment commensurate with his eternity, if that doom be consistent with his righteousness, justice, goodness, and mercy, (but only under this supposition,) which is the point to be proved, but which never can be proved on this side of the grave; nay, the proof here is all the other way, and the very essence of just punishment is proportion. This admission, however, of the possible execution of a possible or probable commination, although opposed to all our natural notions of things,—although we see not the way of it, and deny that it is revealed in the oracles of God, is very different from that which leads the majority of divines, to use Tillotson's words, “saucily to determine and pronounce what God must do in this case.”

“Comminations (observes the celebrated Stillingfleet,† as it were following out Tillotson's reasoning) do speak only the *debitum pænæ*, and the necessary

* Tillotson, vol. 1. p. 325, et seq. Tucker's Light of Nature, vol. 4, p. 337. † Or. Sac. vol. 1. p. 222.

obligation to punishment ; but therein God doth not bind himself up as he doth in absolute promises : the reason is, because comminations confer no right to any which absolute promises do ; and therefore God is not bound to necessary performance of what he threatens."

The well-known Dr. Priestley too was, if I mistake not, an Universalist. His opinions on this subject are not expressly given in his "Corruptions of Christianity," although, I think, they may be pretty accurately inferred ; and it is, I believe, understood that he ultimately embraced the doctrine we now advocate. "In the Deity* (says he), justice can be nothing more than a modification of goodness or benevolence, which is his sole governing principle, the object and *end* of which is the happiness of his creatures and subjects." Again he says, (what seems to me incontrovertible,) the great outline of Christianity is,† "that the universal Parent of mankind commissioned Jesus Christ to invite men to the practice of virtue, by the assurance of his mercy to the penitent, and of his purpose to raise to immortal life and happiness all the virtuous and the good ; but to inflict an *adequate* punishment on the wicked." Now, in what sense can this purpose of God be said to be fulfilled by inflicting everlasting punishments for temporary transgressions?‡ And (as is observed by the amiable Dr. Blair §) "noth-

* Corr. of Christy. vol. 1. p. 159—260, &c. 8vo.

† Vol. 2, p. 447.

‡ Ser. vol. 5, p. 108.

ing can make any resistance to God's purpose, or fall out in any way beside or beyond his plan." Again, "nothing (says Bishop Newton) is more contrariant to the divine nature and attributes, than for God to bestow existence on any beings whose destiny he foreknows must terminate in wretchedness, without recovery."* Even Jeremy Taylor,† who confidently infers, that "the worm of conscience and the unquenchable fire of hell have no period at all, but shall last as long as God lasts, or the measure of a proper eternity," tells us, "it is certain that God's mercies are infinite, and it is also certain that the matter of eternal torments cannot truly be understood;"—sentiments which, (taken in connection,) as I do not pretend to understand, I shall not (in deference to the excellent Jeremy) attempt to explain.

* See Edwards on Salvation, 8vo. p. 350. Newton's Dissert :
on the Final State and Condition of Men.^c

† Ser. vol. 1, p. 60, vol. 2, p. 349.

LETTER IV.

“ Look to me, all the ends of the earth, and be saved,—is the wide and generous announcement by which he would recall, from the very outermost limits of his sinful creation, the most worthless and polluted of those who have ventured away from him.”

Chalmers.

“ Behold the merry minstrels of the morn,
The swarming songsters of the careless grove,
Ten thousand throats ! that, from the flowering thorn,
Hymn their *good* God, and carol sweet of love.”

Thomson.

NAMES, I readily admit, are of no avail in matters of this sort ; and I only mention these learned authorities of the Church, to relieve the reader from any uneasiness he may feel at the thoughts of an attempt to disturb what he may have been led to consider was scriptural truth hitherto, unchallenged and unchallengeable. Here we see some of the ablest and most pious men of which the Church can boast, either questioning the tenet of the eternity of hell torments, or unequivocally entertaining the belief of the final restoration of all things, as the doctrine of Christ, preached by his Apostles. Indeed, when I look to the epistles of St. Paul, or peruse the glow-

ing language of the Prophets, it is impossible for me to reconcile the expressions they use with any other conviction on their part, than that of the universal restoration.

“ For God (says the great Apostle*) hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.”

“ For† as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order : Christ the first fruits ; afterwards they that are Christ’s, at his coming.—Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father ; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.—The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death.—For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted which did put all things under him.—And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that *God may be all in all.*”

“ Having‡ made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed to himself : that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, *even in him.*”

* Rom. xi. 32.

† 1 Cor. xv. 22—29.

‡ Ephes. i. 9, 10.

“ Wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

“ For† it *pleased the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell : and (having made peace through the blood of his cross) by him to reconcile all things unto himself : by him I say, whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven.”

“ For‡ this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ ; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

I do not stop to examine, at present, the foregoing passages from the New Testament ; but if words have meaning, three things are clearly declared :—First, the universal restoration of all things. Second, the end of our Saviour’s mediatorial office and vicarious government. Third, the universal empire of Almighty God, “ that God may be all in all,” in the fulness and plenitude of the Triune Deity.—How these results are to be accomplished it is not our province to explain ; but that they are here revealed by the inspired Apostle seems to me to admit of no question. If it be objected, that in Luke we are

* Phil. ii. 9—11.

† Col. i. 19, 20.

‡ 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4, 5.

told—Of* Christ's "kingdom there shall be no end:" we might reply from the same Evangelist—"For the things concerning me have an end;" and we might slur over these apparently contradictory allegations by thus neutralizing them. But there is no occasion for any such process—the passages are perfectly intelligible; for, although Christ's mediatorial kingdom shall have an end, when its purposes are fulfilled, the reign of Christ, the Messiah, in a Scriptural sense, shall then commence, we are assured, in unity and equality, and throughout eternity, with the Father;—in a way no doubt quite inexplicable to me, (so far as his equality and unity are concerned,) and certainly transcending my utmost powers to comprehend in any manner of way.^a But my ignorance, or apprehension, is not the measure of possibility even here, far less hereafter; and to expect clear and distinct views of such matters, is at once to forget the nature and extent of a finite and limited understanding, and the condition of darkness and of blindness in which it now moves.†

Again, we find the same doctrines are inculcated in the Old Testament:—

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever."‡

"And§ it shall come to pass in that day (of

* Luke i. 33, and xxii. 37. † See Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met.

Subjects, p. 69.

‡ Ps. ciii. 8, 9.

§ Is. xxiv. 21, 22, 23.

judgments), that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.”—“ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it.” *—“ I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” †—“ For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth.” ‡

“ Who§ is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.”

“ O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever.” Here, as is observed by the late Dr. Brown, || the “ very cause of giving thanks to him is the perpetual duration of his mercy.”

* Is. xl. 5. † Is. xlv. 23. ‡ Is. lvii. 16. § Mic. vii. 18.

|| Comp. View of Christy. vol. ii. p. 329.

LETTER V.

“ Thus, I am sure, the best and most ancient Philosophers thought
in this very controversy.” *Sherlock.*

“ We are but fools,
To trifle in disputes, or vainly struggle
With that *eternal* mercy which protects us.”—*Ford.*

THE foregoing references to Scripture are purposefully few ; and I have confined these brief notices to the names of Churchmen in ancient and modern times ; but if we extend our inquiries to laymen, we shall find abundance of authority. It has indeed been said, by a late learned Divine,* (and was before observed, if I remember well, in the “ Minute Philosopher” of Bishop Berkeley,) that the doctrine was admitted by the most enlightened Heathen Philosophers ; and we have a quotation from Plato given us, in corroboration of this conclusion. I readily admit the excellence of the authority quoted ; but it seems to me that the scope of Plato’s reasonings suggests a different reading,—and that Philosopher must be admitted to the privilege of explaining

* Dr. Brown—Essay on the Existence of a Creator.

and reconciling the drift of his opinions with the whole spirit and tenour of his writings. Neither can he be fairly interpreted from one solitary passage, without relief from the strength and confidence of contrary assertions, and the whole bearing of his Theology, as a professed Pythagorean, who expressly lays down the doctrine of Transmigration, representing the fall of man, the re-appearance of God, and the restoration of the whole human race.

“ The Philosophy of Plato, (says the very learned Chevalier Ramsay,*) as we have shewn, is an emanation of the Pythagorean doctrine; and we know that Phythagoras derived his from the sages of Egypt, the Magi of Persia, and the Indian Gymnosophists, whose sentiments and philosophy he had studied. We may therefore look upon the Platonic scheme as the quintessence of all the oriental learning on this important subject. This Philosopher speaks thus of the primitive earth:—‘ The ethereal earth, the first abode of souls, is placed in the pure regions of Heaven, where the stars are seated. We that live in this low abyss are apt to fancy that we are on a high place; and we call the air the heavens,—just like a man that from the bottom of the sea should view the sun and stars through the waters, and fancy the ocean to be the firmament itself. But if we had wings to mount on high, we should see that there is the true Heaven, the true

* Princ. of Nat. and Rev. Rel. vol. ii. p. 280.—See also his Discourse on the Mythology of the Pagans.

light, and the true earth. As in the sea every thing is altered and disfigured, by the salts that abound in it,—so in our present earth every thing is deformed, corrupted, and ruinous, when compared with the primitive earth, which was immense—whereas, now, we know and inhabit only a small part of it.’ By this (continues the Chevalier) Plato and the ancients seem to believe, that the earth we now inhabit is only a small portion of a luminous star detached from the ethereal regions, and changed into a dark opaque gross planet.’ In the same dialogue we have this magnificent description (according to the Chevalier) ‘of that ethereal earth of which ours is only a broken crust’ :—‘ In that ethereal earth every thing was beautiful, harmonious, and transparent ; fruits of an excellent taste grew there naturally, and it was watered with rivers of nectar ; there men breathed the light, as we breathe the air ; and they drank waters that were purer than air itself.’ In the dialogue (I still quote from the Chevalier) called the Politicus, he names this primitive state of the earth, the reign of Saturn, and describes it in this manner —‘ God was then the prince and common father of all : he governed the world by himself, as he governs it now by inferior deities. Rage and cruelty did not then prevail upon the earth ; war and sedition were not so much as known. God himself took care of the sustenance of mankind, and was their guardian and shepherd. There were no magistrates or civil polity as there are now ; all men were governed by right reason and the love of

order. In these happy days the fertile fields yielded fruits and corn without the labour of tillage. Mankind stood in no need of raiment to cover their bodies, being troubled with no inclemency of the seasons ; and they took their rest upon beds of turf of perpetual verdure.' Plato, in other places, (adds the Chevalier,) describes how souls, by neglecting the Divine guidance,* fell from the happy state which they enjoyed in this primitive, ethereal, celestial, paradisiacal earth :—' They grew heavy and sluggish, broke their wings, fell down upon the earth, entered into human bodies more or less vile, according as they had been more or less elevated. Souls less degraded than others dwell in the bodies of philosophers. The most despicable of all dwell in the bodies of tyrants and evil princes. It was after this degradation of spirits that Saturn, the maker of the universe, having quitted the reins of his empire, hid himself in an inaccessible retreat. The foundations of the world were shaken by motions contrary to its first principle and last end, and lost its beauty and order. Then it was that good and evil were blended together.' After this (concludes the Chevalier) Plato describes the third state of the earth in the clearest terms :—' In the end, lest the world should be plunged in an eternal abyss of confusion, God, the author of the primitive order, will appear again, and re-assume the reins of empire. Then he will change, amend, embellish, and

* See the *Phædrus*, p. 323. Bip. vol. x.

restore the whole frame of nature, and put an end to decay, to age, to disease, and to death.' ”

Such is the *substance* of the highly figurative descriptions of Plato, as given by the learned Chevalier Ramsay ; and in more particularly considering the matter, we shall take occasion to advert generally to the opinions of antiquity on some important points.

In such discussions, he will look for much uncertainty who has in the solitude of his own heart pondered on the mysteries of Creation and of Providence ; and he who has ever explored the realms of metaphysical speculation, will not expect to find the enquiries of the most surpassing intellects, on the nature of things, and the final destiny of man, free from intricacy and doubt. The *eternal truths of religion* are of *overwhelming importance* ; and there are questions in the history of our presence here, as connected with our progress and existence hereafter, before which the mind quails, and reels back in utter helplessness and confusion. But it is nevertheless the province of reason to endeavour after a knowledge of divine things, and to strive to put away for a while the concerns of time and of sense, before these shall be for ever at an end, and we shall have become the beings of another sphere.

LETTER VI.

“A good poet and an honest historian may afford learning enough for a gentleman; and such a one, whilst he reads these authors as his diversion, will have a truer relish of their sense, and understand them better, than a pedant with all his labours, and the assistance of his volumes of commentators.”

Shaftesbury.

“Huge commentators grace my learned shelves,
Notes upon books out-do the books themselves.”

Bramston.

THE passage relative to future punishment, to which I have alluded in the foregoing letter, occurs in the *Phædo* of Plato.* He is describing three different judgments to be pronounced on the dead;—first, on those who are neither entirely criminal nor innocent; secondly, on those who are incorrigible; and thirdly, on those who, though guilty of great sins, are yet corrigible. The first and third are reclaimed after certain sufferings and purgations; but the second, according to Plato, are consigned to Tartarus, “whence they return not,” (ὅθεν οὐποτέ ἐκβαίνουσιν) that is (say some) to eternal punishment. Towards

* *Phædo* Bip. Edit. vol. i. p. 257.

the end of the tenth book of the Republic,* Plato speaks, as it would at first appear, most determinately of the interminable punishments of the wicked ; for after representing the proportionate punishment of crime, he then exhibits Aridœus (the tyrant who had killed his father and brother) in Tartarus, “ who shall not come hither ;” but he goes on to say that there are other great criminals in the same stage of suffering, who with Aridœus make ineffectual attempts to return, “ who are either incurable, or are not yet sufficiently punished,” (as it would seem from the alternative stated,) admitting the possibility of the dismal eternity,—but certainly implying, at the same time, that the period of punishment would only last while they were incurable, or that they would return when purged from their sins. We have adverted to the passages given by the learned Chevalier Ramsay, where Plato lays down the Pythagoric doctrine of transmigration, representing, lastly, the re-appearance of God and the restoration of all things.† Plato‡ elsewhere distinctly assumes the individual consciousness of the soul after death, when it may be adjudged to suffer the *greatest* inflictions :§ and if we will attentively consider, and consistently interpret, his expressions in the Phædo, ||^a and others in the Gorgias, ¶ rela-

* Vol. vii. p. 325. Bip.

† See Politicus, Bip. vol. vi. p. 39, Phædrus passim.

‡ Epist. ii. vol. xi. p. 66, Bip. § Epist. vii. vol. xi. p. 115.

|| Vol. i. p. 257. Bip. ¶ Vol. iv. p. 169. Bip. See also from p. 164.

tive to future punishment, upon which so much reliance is placed, we must obviously understand them in connection with the whole spirit of Plato's theological writings, particularly with reference to what is detailed in the Phædrus, Politicus, and Timæus, as to the transmigration and purgation of the soul, and the restoration of all things. Thus we will be led to conclude, that Plato can substantially be understood to mean no more, without stultifying all his principles as a Pythagorean, and all his authority as a lover of truth, and a philosopher of a consistent theory, than that the wicked condemned to Tartarus shall not be relieved *while* they continue in that state of stony-heartedness, and of alienation from God; and *until* they are sufficiently purged from all the delinquencies of sin, to be again regenerated and born into a new life. But, indeed, the account given us by Plato of the punishments of the wicked seems to be either fabular or allegorical.* The very Dialogue^b we have been considering from the Phædo is prefaced by the declaration that it was merely a fable; and in the Republic it is somewhere stated that such stories, while they weigh with us in sickness, are disregarded by the man in health; while in the Cratylus, Socrates is represented as displeased with the vulgar idea we entertain of a future state as a dark and gloomy abode:—"Mankind† (says he)

* Bip. vol. vi. p. 153. λεγόμενοι μυθοὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν ᾧ αἰῶνος

† Bip. p. 269, vol. iii.

greatly err concerning the power of this God, (Pluto,) and they fear him, without reason, because they consider that, after any one is dead, he continues there (in Hades) for ever, deprived of the body." He goes on to assure us that Pluto, whom he here describes as a liberal benefactor, only admits the disembodied soul into his society after it has been "purified* from corporeal disease and appetite," and then he engages the affections, and draws them to the pursuits, and binds them by the love of virtue. Again, in the *De Legibus*† he says, we ought to disabuse ourselves of the unjust notions we entertain of Hades, ignorant that the greatest good may befall us from the gods who preside there. Bishop Warburton, in his *Divine Legation of Mosès*,^c will have it, that Plato did not believe in a future state. Dr. Whately,^d in his *Essays on "some of the peculiarities of the Christian religion,"* argues (I think) that the ancients either were ignorant of, or disbelieved, the immortality of the soul; and the late Dr. Brown quotes Plato for the doctrine of eternal punishments hereafter; while Cicero‡ (no mean authority) assures us that it was the universal admission of all Philosophers, that God could neither be angry with nor hurt any one. If, indeed, it appears to our humble judgment the testimony of Plato's writings can be relied on for any thing they prove, if words have meaning, that this great man never entertained

* Vol. iii. p. 271.

† Lib. V. vol. viii. p. 205.

‡ De Off. lib. iii. c. xxviii.

the settled notion that death extinguished the intellectual consciousness of being, or disturbed the moral permanency of the soul. Although imaginative and beautifully poetical in his thoughts and diction, he never permits any colouring to obscure the glory of an aspiration after the true and good—after something nobler, and purer, and holier, than any thing which this cold earth and wrong world can supply. Whatever might be the advances of virtue in this life, towards the enjoyment of intellectual happiness and the perception of speculative truth, their full influence could only be experienced, when, freed from the trammels of the body, we exchange the shadow for the substance of knowledge, and are enabled to perceive truth, in its uniform, essential, unchangeable, and eternal nature.

Without adverting to all the particular shades of opinion, and without essaying any lengthened or attempting any learned discussion, (which we presume not to be able to give,) we may here endeavour very briefly to collect the substance of the notions of the ancients on this important matter.

The reader, then, will bear in mind that the pervading influence of the whole of ancient philosophy was that of the *τὸ ἐν*, or one ineffable originating principle, the unity from which all things flow, and the good to which all things tend—involving ultimately the refusion of the whole into this one originating cause of all. No matter how this centre of light became diverted in passing through different systems,—or led some gifted minds to dis-

cover the individuality, and immortality of the human soul, created by, or emanating from it—this general principle lay at the bottom of all their reasonings, and was the foundation of all their theories. We have it from Laertius, that the prevailing tenet of the Greek Philosophy was (ἐξ ἑνὸς τὰ πάντα γίνεσθαι καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἀναλυεσθαι), that all things proceed from one, and will ultimately be re-solved into the same unity which Aristotle says some call the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν).*^c Sextus Empiricus† and Plutarch‡ repeat substantially the same thing of the Pythagoreans and Platonists, to whom Aristotle alludes;—the former, according to Syrianus, calling God the one (ἐν λεγόντων τὸν θεόν)—the latter the super-essential τὸ ἐν, the good, ineffable, and unknown cause of all; and both holding, generally, that the one pervades the whole by “force and not by extension”—as the centre of all being, and to which all being returns—recognizing, at the same time, the immortality of the soul, as the work and creation of an eternal Deity—(ἀφθαρτον—εἶδος τοῦ αἰδίου θεοῦ.) The same principle lies at the root of Aristotle’s § reasoning, to which we have in another place referred, where he speaks of the immortality of the intellect alone—that only (which, originally divine, and being separated from the passive intelligence of this life by

* Laer. Pro. s. 3. Aris. Met. lib. xiv. c. 4. Duval.

† Lib. ix. Adv. Phys. s. 127.

‡ Lib. iv. c. 7. Plac. Phil. Plato, (Parm.) passim. Siris. s. 129.

§ Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. p. 213.

death) is immortal. Seneca* has it, that we are the parts and members of God, the whole in which we are contained ; and much to the same purpose speak Epictetus and Antoninus. † It may appear difficult to reconcile all this with the opinions ascribed to the philosophers of the individuality of the soul ; but let us remember the difficulty of the subject,—and if it be understood of the Scriptural affirmation, that the body shall return to the dust, but the spirit to Him who gave it, ‡ as implying immortality, and admitting individuality, why may we not conclude that (in explanation of ancient philosophy), as all things return to their original elements, the matter of which we are composed to its parent earth, and the spirit to the parent spirit,—so this is to be taken, philosophically interpreted, as implying the immortality and individuality of the mind. To this let us add the recorded maxim of Cicero, § before noticed, that God could not be angry with nor hurt any one, and we shall have a very good key, if not to the exact creed of antiquity as to what they did positively believe, certainly as to what they could not believe consistently with these fundamental principles. Keeping in view, then, these points—first, of an originating principle of all things, from which the soul emanated, and to which it would ultimately return ; and, secondly, the universal belief of

* Ep. 92. † Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. p. 218, 219.

‡ Eccles. xii. 7.—See also Horsley, Serm. 39, on this text ; and

note j, p. 42.

philosophy, that God could neither be angry with nor hurt any one—let us advert to the particular tenets of the best schools. Bishop Warburton, as we have said, attempted to show that none of the ancient philosophers, with the exception of Socrates,* believed in a future state of retribution ;—Dr. Brown ascribes to the most enlightened of them, the belief of eternal punishments ; and Dr. Whately has, as we observed, argued that the immortality of the soul was unknown to, or disbelieved by the ancients. We venture to dissent from these conclusions, however recommended by the great learning of the writers ; and we propose here mainly to endeavour to show, that the doctrine of the eternity of future punishment could form no part of ancient philosophy. And this, perhaps, will be best done by briefly considering the tenets of the leading schools of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and Zeno,^g with reference to the notion, in some shape embraced by all abstractly, of the absorption of the individual into the universal spirit—a principle which, although unexplained, and perhaps unintelligible, especially when held in conjunction with the soul's individuality—yet is it sufficient for our present purpose, to demonstrate its entire incompatibility with the doctrine of eternal punishment.

Of Pythagoras it is admitted that the Metempsychosis was the peculiar and characteristic feature of his teaching ; and the summary of his doctrine

* Div. Leg. vol. i. p. 306—326.

on this particular was, that the sensitive soul perishes, but that the rational mind is immortal, which, being freed from the former, passes into the regions of the dead, where it remains until it is sent back into this world to inhabit some other bodies; and, after successive purgations, returns to the gods and the eternal source from which it emanated.* Now, Plato was equally favourable to the doctrine of the Metempsychosis. And he says (in substance) that a strict account is kept,† and will be followed by commensurate awards hereafter, and that no wickedness, could it fly whither it may, or go whither it will, can escape the eye which never slumbereth;‡ that all wars and fightings originate in our connection with the body, and the lusts and desires of the flesh;§ and that God is propitiated by the virtues of the soul.|| But what makes good our argument as to his negation of the doctrine of eternal punishment, is what is detailed in that strange, mystical rhapsody, the philosophical description given in the *Timæus* of the creation of the world.ⁱ We are there told, that after the formation of human souls, the Deity ordained that the man who passed through life, mortifying his lusts and passions, should enjoy future happiness. If he

* See Enfield's *Philosophy*, and authorities there referred to, vol. i. p. 397. † *Deleg.* lib. iv. p. 188. *Bip.* vol. viii.

‡ *Deleg.* lib. x. p. 108. *Bip.* vol. ix.—See particularly what the guest says.

§ *Phædo.* vol. i. p. 150. || *Alcibiades*, 2d. *Bip.* vol. v. p. 99.

failed, he was to pass into other animals, until the irrational part should at length be overcome, and the soul restored to its original purity. With all this it is clear that Plato maintained the individuality of the human soul,* never confounding the soul of the universe with the great first cause. The truth is, the re-union of the soul after death to the universal spirit, in entire refusion, is, as we have said, an unintelligible abstraction ; and it is necessary to advert to it only to demonstrate that the philosophy of which it was the basis, could by no possibility (however it might leave the question as to individual immortality) lead to the conclusion of the eternity of separation from God, and of future punishment.†

Of Aristotle, the great disciple of Plato, and founder of the Peripatetic school, we have quite enough to shew, from his own doctrines, that he could not advocate eternal punishment. In another place† we have ventured to give a short abstract of his opinions as to the nature of the human soul, the agent intellect of which he pronounced to be immortal, but the passive corruptible—that is, according to Warburton, ‡ meaning, by the latter, the sensations and reflections of this life, which are doomed to pass away—by the former, the divine (*θεῖον*) intellect, the divinity (if I may so say) within us, which

* See the *Meno*. Bip. iv. p. 350. x. *Rep.* Bip. vii. p. 315, et seq.
vii. Eγ.

† Notes on *Rel. Mor.* and *Met. Sub.* p. 56.

‡ *Div. Leg.* vol. i. p. 390.

is for ever permanent and immortal. This passage has been attended with considerable difficulty, in the opinion of commentators ; but the sense is in any view quite opposed to the doctrines we are combating, and seems to be substantially, that the power of the intellect remains unaltered by death, although the manner of exercising it here shall be dissolved and perish. We regret to be obliged to add a passage which declares death to be the termination of existence, beyond which there is neither good nor evil (*ἡ δὲ δύναμις τῷ τεθνεῶσι ἢ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν γίνεσθαι*) ;^k and yet we have another passage where the dead are represented as affected by the condition of the living (*τι ἀπο τῶν ζώντων τοῖς τεθνεῶσι*).^l But we have said enough to warrant our conclusion that Aristotle could not possibly believe in eternal punishment ; and I shall only add, that it seems to me his contradictory ideas relating to the immortality of the soul may be traced to the analogy (partially revived by Mr Locke in modern days) of the mind to an unwritten tablet, thus deriving all our knowledge from sensation, which, perishing at death, leaves us as we had never been ;—but the intellect,—the divinity which stirs within us, is immortal.^m

With regard to the opinions of the Stoics, of which Zeno was the founder, we have perhaps said enough here, and in another place,* to demonstrate that their doctrine of alternate inundations and con-

* Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. k. p. 217.

flagrations, destroying all things save the eternal and regenerating principles of all things—matter and God—could not possibly admit the idea of eternal punishments. It is true Zenoⁿ taught us to expect future rewards and punishments; but Seneca again, (in contradiction to another passage of the same Epistle,) will have death to be the termination of grief and pain, which consigns us to that tranquillity in which we reposed before we were called into this existence.* Nay, Epictetus, ° the severest Stoic of them all, unequivocally maintains that there is no such thing as Hell, and that after death we are re-united to the kindred elements from which we originated. The opinions of the Stoics are certainly extremely vague.* Perhaps the substance of them will be found in what we have elsewhere said :* at any rate it is evident, that by no possibility could they infer eternal punishments; for at most, if, (like Cicero,) they seem to people† the stars with the souls of the virtuous, they could only condemn the wicked to endure for a time, or until the periodical conflagration, and consequent restoration of nature.

But what then comes of the opinions of the Poets who maintain so decidedly the eternity of future punishments? Seneca,‡ alluding to the tranquillity

* Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. k. p. 217, 218, and 219.—

Epic. lib. 3, c. 24.

† See Enfield's Philosophy, c. xi. "of the Stoic sect."

‡ Ad. Mar. 19.

ty into which death will replace us, tells Marcia it is the last evil,—for the Poets only disturb us by imaginary fears. Plato banished them from his republic.* And Polybius considers the superstitious fear of the gods and of eternal punishments valuable only as useful institutions,—indicating his disbelief of such doctrines, but at the same time his deference to their utility in controuling and restraining the public and private actions of the citizens of the state.† It is true Virgil, in the sixth *Æneid*, speaks of the immortal liver (“*immortale jecur*”) of Tityus—(the torments of an evil conscience, as Macrobius‡ explains it)—and records, of the unhappy Theseus, in Tartarus, that he shall abide there for ever (“*sedet æternumque sedebit*”); but, in the second *Georgic*, we find him expressing the happiness of the man who can disregard all such fooleries; and we must not forget that Virgil was an Epicurean, whose sect utterly disclaimed any belief in futurity,§ as Cæsar ventured to declare in his place, before the whole assembled Senate of Rome.¶ Such an unbeliever, too, was Lucretius, in the most extensive sense of the word; and he complains of the general superstition which would lead us to fear the poetic fables of eternal punishment after death.‡ I do not give Lucretius as an authority on any disputed point of religious

* Bip. vol. vi. p. 267. † See Lib. 1, c. 10, in Som. Sc.

‡ Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. p. 217.

§ See lib. 1,—l. 112,—lib. 3,—l. 16,—990, et seq.

belief, but merely to shew, in connection with what we have before said, that the doctrines we are combating were really confined to the vulgar, and originated in the imaginary horrors of the Poets, or the politic institutions of the state.—Nay, Cicero, (in the first book of the Tusculan questions,*) a professed Academic, ridicules such things as stories which no sensible man would believe; and Juvenal (who no doubt wrote at a period when the Epicurean philosophy, in its worst sense, had corrupted the whole Roman world) declares these fables only fit for the nursery.† And if Lucan, (in the sixth book of the Pharsalia,) uses poetic licence in affirmation of the eternity of punishment, we must remember that he was a rigid Stoic, and that the sober prose and philosophical principles of his sect altogether negative such a conclusion. I may certainly claim Ovid, too, in defence of our position, unless it be contended that we are not to use the authority of a work of imagination like the Metamorphoses in supporting any philosophical opinion.

“ Why thus affrighted at an empty name, ‡
 A dream of darkness and fictitious flame,—
 Vain themes of wit, which but in poems pass,
 And fables of a world that never was !”

What then are we to make of these contradictory opinions, or rather fancies, of the Poets—“ fables,”

* Sec. 21.

† Sat. 2, l. 149.

‡ Met. lib. 15,—l. 154.—The words are put into the mouth of Pythagoras.—See note a, p. 34.

according to Euripides * by which we are misled and carried away—what Sextus Empiricus makes them, according to Warburton, “poetic fables of hell ;”† or what Strabo has declared them to be, fables or imaginary terrors (*μορμολυκας*), calculated to allure or frighten the silly multitude (*νηπιιοφρονας*), to whom it is impossible to communicate abstract truth, and who cannot be controuled by the calm and tranquil wisdom of philosophy, the handmaid of religion, whose sweet and consolatory precepts it is her great privilege to investigate ; and the great comfort and consolation of every reflecting mind to be able with all humility to maintain. For, as the belief of a presiding power of goodness is the noblest stretch of our faculties here,—so the necessity of an implicit resignation to his will is the great truth we have to learn and to practise in our progress through life ; and he is the rationally happy man to whom this abiding conviction is continually present, not constraining his obedience under the fear of evils inseparable from humanity and beyond his controul,—but receiving a willing, and if possible a cheerful acquiescence, through every dispensation of Providence, resulting from the sense he entertains of the Supreme Disposer of all things, and the unshaken confidence he reposes in his merciful and uncontrollable government.

* Hippolitus, l. 197.

† See Warburton, Div. Leg. p. 92, vol. i. Strabo, lib. 1. Aris. Met. lib. xiv. c. 8. Duval, p. 1003, D.

LETTER VII.

“ I have meddled with no man’s interest, that only excepted
which is eternal.” *J. Taylor.*

“ Intent with endless view to pore
The schoolmen and the sages o’er :
Their books from wisdom widely stray,
Or point at best the longest way.
I’ll seek a readier path, and go
Where wisdom’s surely taught below.”

Parnell.

THAT admirable moralist, Plutarch, gives us a passage involving, as at first it would appear, the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked :—
“ Those whom the Deity knows to be absolutely incurable, he destroys.”* But, on the other hand, we have a passage irreconcilable with this, where the immortality of the soul is distinctly asserted, and the probability of rewards and punishments :—
“ As the soul survives the dissolution of the body, and exists after death, it is most probable that it will receive rewards and punishments in a future state ; for it goes through a kind of contest during

* Plutarch, p. 551, vol. ii. C. D. Xyl.

the present life, and when that is done, it will have its recompense hereafter.”* The same Philosopher tells us, as observed by Stillingfleet,† that Thales was the first who maintained, not that the soul was immortal, for that was admitted before, but that it had “the principle of motion within itself,‡ and so could not be supposed to forsake itself, or to cease moving by the death of the body.”

Now, if the soul be naturally immortal, and survive the body—if it cannot cease moving by the death of the body—it cannot be destroyed, unless by the immediate act of God, “who can kill both soul and body ;” and I infer, generally, from these passages (contradictory when taken apart), the existence of the soul and a state of rewards and punishments after death ;—which Plutarch, indeed, distinctly maintains, in his treatise concerning those whom God is slow to punish.^a In a question of this nature, it is, it may be said, perhaps, of little moment what were the opinions of the ancient Philosophers. It is certainly satisfactory, at least, to observe, that the doctrine we oppose is not one of natural religion ; at any rate it is pleasant to find these illustrious men not opposed to us ; while we discover that much of the censure, and more of the errors, that have been ascribed to them, arise from fixing on isolated passages of their writings, with-

* Plutarch, 2 vol. p. 560, 561. F. A.

† Orig. Sac. vol. ii. p. 247.

‡ Ἀεὶ κίνητον καὶ αὐτοκίνητον.

out adverting to the general spirit and tendency of the whole.

That the opinions of the Philosophers to whom we have alluded were, in substance, such as I have endeavoured to explain, seems pretty evident,—shaded, as they no doubt are, by some expressions implying contradictory doctrines, which in truth will be found in some scattered passages through many of the ancient writers—(and, perhaps, I may add, not a few of the modern)—an obliquity which he will not be over strict to mark, who considers the sublimity of all subjects which reach into eternity,—how far they are placed beyond the sphere of the ordinary capacity of man, and how far removed from the possibility of that certainty, through the efforts of the most exalted intellect, which speculative minds are perpetually seeking. For my own part, I confess that, so far as I am acquainted with the *spirit* of their philosophy, the doctrine of eternal reprobation seems to me at variance with a fair and full interpretation of their opinions generally, and virtually opposite to the moral and devotional principles of the purest schools of ancient wisdom,—those of Pythagoras, of Socrates, of Plato, of Aristotle, and of Zeno.

It is not admissible, in matters of importance especially, to infer the sentiments of men, and then to argue from such inferences as if they were conclusive. If a writer distinctly informs me he believes in the immortality of the soul, and in

future rewards and punishments, he might with equal facility add his belief in the eternity of future punishments, if that formed part of his creed; and we are not at liberty to deduce so monstrous a conclusion from his ambiguity, far less from his silence. Marcus Antoninus,*^b when he asks by what oversight it could happen, that the gods, who have ordered all things so well, should yet suffer good men to be extinguished by death, so as never to exist again, uses language of which there can be no doubt. And why did not many other sages of antiquity express themselves with equal precision relative to eternal reprobation? Merely, I presume, because it formed no part of their belief. Nor can I trace it to a more accurate source (excepting the authority of Scripture, if it be there revealed, which we shall by and by endeavour to discover) than the Eastern dogma of Manes,^c or two eternal principles of good and evil, from which, undoubtedly, the doctrine of never-ending punishment may be naturally deduced. And it is, perhaps, from blending the good and evil principle, in some unintelligible mode, that the duration of the hell of the Mahometans is described in language not a little confused. They believe that all things proceed from

* Lib. xii. sect. 5.—Επειδαν ἀπαξ ἀποθάνωσι, μηκέτι αὐτοὶ γίνεσθαι ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ παντελὲς ἀπισβῆκεναι—Ne reviennent plus a la vie, mais sont eteints pour toujours? as it is translated by Dacier.—Folio. Paris, 1800, p. 392.

God, (except the evil which cometh from man,) and in the absolute and immutable decrees of Providence. But they hold also that Eblis, or the Devil (whom they personify) fell, because he refused, at the command of God, to worship Adam; * that he is of subtle fire, and is reserved for punishment at the resurrection. And they recognize, in so far at least, the eternity of hell torments, or the indestructibility of evil, according to that frequent expression in the Koran, (when speaking of the unhappy wretches in hell,) “they must remain there for ever.” Yet, says Sale, it is the “infidels alone who will be liable to eternity of damnation; for the Moslems, or those who have embraced the true religion, and have been guilty of heinous sins, will be delivered thence, after they have expiated their crimes by their sufferings.” †

I will not shock the reader by any reference to the description of the punishments of hell, whether given by Christian or Mahometan. I had occasion, in a former volume, to notice the opinion of the stern Tertullian, rejoicing over “sage Philosophers blushing in red-hot flames.” ‡ Bellarmin, the renowned Italian Jesuit, the able and candid defender of Catholicism, “makes crowding and sweating to be

* Sale's Koran, vol. i. p. 7, 109, 187; vol. ii. p. 7, 104.

† Koran, preliminary discourse, p. 122, 137.—See also Barrow on the impiety of Paganism and Mahometanism, vol ii. p. 155.

‡ 1 Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. p. 248.

one of its torments.”* But all this is nothing to the Koran, whose lightest punishment is shoes of fire, causing, by their intensity, the skull to boil like a cauldron, and whose more direful inflictions the curious reader will find amply detailed by Sale.† Indeed, the learned but “ill-natured” Dr. South, as the gossiping Dr. Calamy‡ calls him, leaves the outrageous Calvinist little further to wish for in this particular. “Every lash (says he§) which God then gives the sinner shall be with a scorpion ; every pain which he inflicts shall be more eager than appetite, more cruel than revenge ; every faculty, both of soul and body, shall have its distinct, proper, and peculiar torment applied to it, and be directly struck there where it has the quickest, the tenderest, and the sharpest sense of any painful impression.—But I shall use no other argument (adds the Doctor), to evince the greatness of their torments, but only this, that the devil shall be the instrument of their execution. And surely a mortal enemy will be a dreadful executioner ; and the punishment which an infinite justice inflicts by the hand of implacable malice must needs be intolerable.” Good God ! whose tender mercies are

* Calmet's Dicty. vol. i. p. 671.—Mosheim, Ecc. Hist. vol. iv. p. 222.

† Vol. ii. p. 169, 415, 477.

‡ See his Life and Times, vol. i. p. 276.

§ Vol. vii. 8vo. p. 143, on Rom. vi. 23.

over all thy works—what a picture does this afford us of the universality of thy benevolence ! The Devil, sin personified—that which cannot look on thee and live—is here made the executioner of thy will ; and “ the hand of implacable malice ” is suffered to inflict the punishments of thy “ infinite justice.” Alas ! poor human reason. Let us listen to the melody of nature :—

“ The quality of mercy is not strained ;
 It droppeth, as the gentle dew from heaven,
 Upon the place beneath.
 ’Tis mightiest in the mightiest ; it becomes
 The throned monarch better than his crown.
 His sceptre shews the force of temporal power,
 The attribute of awe and majesty,
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.
 But mercy is above the sceptr’d sway ;
 It is enthroned in the heart of kings ;
 It is an attribute of God himself.
 And earthly power doth then shew likest God’s
 When mercy seasons justice.”

Perhaps it is ignorance—perhaps heresy—perhaps both—that leads the writer of these pages to recognize better, more orthodox divinity (properly and strictly so called), in the lines of the poet, than in the logic of the divine.

“ The door of mercy will be shut (says Newcome*), and the anchor of hope cut off, and all bowels of compassion denied by the God of mercy, who will *laugh* at their destruction—by angels and saints, who shall *rejoice* when they see vengeance—

* Catechetical Sermons, 2 vols. 8vo. vol. i. p. 405.

by their fellow-sufferers, the devil, and the damned, *exulting* over their misery." The words which I have placed in *Italics* will convey to the eye of the intelligent reader a faint image of the picture here sketched,—and I dare not allow myself to be more particular in bringing out the figures of this satanic representation.

LETTER VIII.

“ If any opinions deserve to be contended for, they are those which give us lovely ideas of the Deity, and of our fellow-creatures.” *Hutchison.*

“ Every bush and tufted tree
Warbles sweet Philosophy ;
Mortal, fly from doubt and sorrow,
God provideth for to-morrow.”—*Heber.*

THE reader who has accompanied me thus far will see that the doctrine we here defend has nothing novel in it ;—dismissing, therefore, all paralyzing scruples, he will feel at liberty to proceed to a more minute investigation, under the encouraging and satisfactory reflection that it has been advocated, as we have found, by some of the most pious and gifted Churchmen and Laymen of ancient or modern times, among whom we may include the learned Chevalier Ramsay, the ingenious Abraham Tucker, and the amiable Dr. Hartley.^a

Before shaping our arguments, however, it is necessary to premise and fix in our minds some of the essential perfections of the divine nature ;—and here it is matter of no small wonder to find, that

the confidence and certainty of all knowledge commences in that which is inconceivable—the belief of a cause uncaused^b—of a being absolutely perfect and infinite in all things—infinite and perfect, that is God over all—whose goodness cannot (we must conclude) suffer the minds of men to be deceived in those moral truths of which they have a clear conception, or permit them to be hence led, by the legitimate use of their reasoning faculties to certain deductions, *irresistibly* contrary to others,—and which, nevertheless, shall prove false. It is this conviction, that Providence, whose existence is and must be supposed and conceded, cannot lead his creatures to false conclusions by *the fair use* of their reasoning faculties,—that gives certainty and confidence to the operations of our minds, and is indeed the foundation of all firm belief.

To this gracious Being the attribute of eternity, metaphysically so called, belongs—self-existence uncaused—that which never had a beginning, and consequently is essentially endless and eternal, in contradistinction to all objects of creation, which are necessarily limited and circumscribed by the charter of their being.

He is the “Lord thy God,” in unity or oneness—a Being whom no place can confine, and none can exclude.^c

He is ubiquity^d;—present everywhere—he penetrates and permeates all space—“a circle whose centre is everywhere, and circumference nowhere.”

He is omnipotent to do all things not implying a contradiction, whose hand none can stay, and whose power being necessarily ever at one with reason, and wisdom, and goodness, nothing can arrest or controul. In the sublime language of the Psalmist, we read :—“ Whither* shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there ; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea the darkness hideth not from thee ; but the night shineth as the day ; the darkness and the light are both alike unto thee. ^e

He is omniscient, knowing all things, past, present, and to come ; and he sees and comprehends the whole together, at one and the same moment of time. He is just—“ Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” “ Hearken unto me, ye men of understanding.....for the work of a man shall” God “render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.”† And here we may remark (with reference to the drift of much of the reasoning we have in view), that the very description of the justice of the Almighty, in the general government of things, is prefaced by an allusion to

* Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.

† Job xxxiv. 10—12.

the *reasonableness* of the attribute, in the striking appeal—"Ye men of understanding ;" and his ways are elsewhere said to be "equal," in opposition to the ways of man, which are "unequal."* Divine conduct is, and only can be, in our view of things, benevolence exerting itself in the production of the widest range of felicity (compatible with the end proposed), under every given stage of being. In short, we hold it to be clear, (in a combined view of the divine character and purpose,) that all his moral attributes of holiness, justice, mercy, and truth, are only the same "divine benevolence acting in different ways, according to different exigencies, but always for the same sublime end—the propagation of the utmost possible happiness." †

Now, looking to the essential nature of these attributes, and keeping in view the inference from the whole, it will follow, generally, that nothing can be received as truth which is contradictory of them, and particularly that nothing can be admitted opposed to this inference, which appears to be the sum and substance of their united bearing upon the destinies of man—the *diffusion of the greatest possible happiness*,—not here, assuredly, where the scheme is in progress, and man is in training ; but certainly hereafter, when the plan of goodness is completed and we are refined up to the full measure of our intellectual capacities, and the eventual purposes of our creation.

* Ezek. xviii. 25.—Col. iii. 26. † Enc. Brit. 1st ed. vol. 18, p. 418.

The point then comes to be, whether we ought not to give way to that result which is in congruity with the divine character and purpose, supposing both sides of our present question placed in equal uncertainty, (which we hope to show is not the case)—whether, in short, we ought not to lean to mercy as our safest guide, to adopt benevolence as the key to the solution of all our difficulties, and to suspect the soundness of our own hard inferences, wherever we find our paltry reasonings, perhaps from utter ignorance of the reality, at fault, leading us to conclusions certainly repulsive of right conceptions of the God of nature, and equally (as it appears to us) subversive of correct notions of the Deity of revelation. “We cannot imagine that God should reveal to any man any thing that plainly contradicts the essential perfections of the divine nature ; for such a revelation can no more be supposed to be from God than a revelation from God that there is no God.”* “Indeed (as Dr. Clarke observes†), it may universally be looked upon as a never-failing rule, which may in all cases safely be depended upon, that whenever any notion we entertain is in any degree inconsistent with any of the natural and unchangeable attributes of the divine nature, there is always either some latent error in the notion itself, which at present, perhaps, we cannot exactly discover ; or, at least, there is some great defect in our knowledge of several material circumstances,

* Tillotson, vol. ii. p. 14, 15.

† Clarke, vol. i. p. 389.

which, in reality, alter the nature of the whole question."

Now, with all this before us, consider that the doctrine we combat ascribes the infliction of eternal suffering to a Being not only whose arms of infinite mercy and of exact justice are equally righteous and certain,^f but who is emphatically goodness—absolutely and essentially,—yet not necessarily transmitted, like light by the rays of the sun, but communicated through the effects of his will. The sun cannot render its rays less or more intense; they are the necessary result of its essential nature, as a secondary or created cause: but the Deity wills, modifies, and controuls the transmission of his goodness. Hence man is not necessarily happy, or happy in an equal degree at all times; but happy in proportion as he is good, and approximates the goodness of the divine nature,—in the possession of which alone complete happiness is to be found. And this attribute of goodness is the greatest perfection of the divine character—without which, indeed, there could be no perfection; for perfection absolutely and necessarily implies benevolence and goodness, in their most unlimited range. When we talk of goodness in man, we mean the desire and endeavour to communicate happiness to others. So when we talk of goodness (which necessarily includes benevolence) in the Deity, we must mean the communication, mediately or immediately, of the greatest happiness to the created. Again, mercy is only a branch of goodness; and when

we apply it to man, it implies the remission of some merited chastisement. So when we extend it to a gracious Providence, we must mean the pardon of some deserved punishment.

Thus much, at any rate, we may be assured of, that all punishment, by the permission of an omnipotent and merciful God, must be consistent with goodness in the issue. “If man is doomed to suffer, either here or hereafter, the benevolence of the Deity gives me reason to believe, that he will not suffer in vain.*” And I apprehend we can form no intelligible idea of eternal goodness, consistent with the infliction or permission of eternal, irremediable suffering, any more than we can imagine eternal happiness consistent with the knowledge of eternal misery. Can we, for instance, form any idea of the happiness of an almighty Being, who is happy under the knowledge of the infinite suffering of the creatures of his own creation? It is true the Deity must at present know of all the misery which afflicts his creatures; but, whether arising from themselves, or from the unavoidable nature of imperfect things, in a state of painful progression, their misery is only the means of greater good, as the discipline of advancement in holiness; and the omniscience that can appreciate the effect, must not only see the necessity of the cause, but may rejoice in the prospective result,—which it must necessarily infer, in the preparation for, and

* Crombie's Theology, vol. ii. p. 606.

ultimate reception of, an enlarged measure of bliss. But when we are required to form an idea of the happiness of an omniscient Being in the knowledge of the eternal misery of his creatures, or of the goodness, under the same knowledge, of an omnipotent Being, able and willing to save,—we confess we are cast down ; and, if we mistake not, no man can form any intelligible conception of such a supposition. Nor can we part with the conviction that a God of goodness has formed every one of his creatures,* angels and men, Christian and Mahometan, Jew and Pagan, with sufficient means, either here or hereafter, at any rate, to make the sum of his happiness outweigh his misery. And I beg the reader may ponder this assertion, if he cannot satisfy himself of the contrary, (which I think he will find it impossible to do, when he considers the transcendent perfections of the Deity :) he must, I apprehend, go along with the writer of these pages.

“ The light of the sun (it is beautifully observed, I think, by Warburton) is not in the orb itself what we see it in the rainbow—there it is one candid, uniform, perfect blaze of glory—here we separate its perfection in the various attributes of red, yellow, blue, purple, and what else the subtle optician so nicely distinguishes. But still the solar light is not less real in the rainbow, where its rays become thus untwisted, and each differing thread

* See Bishop Newton on Luke x. 37.—Sund. Lib. vol. v.

distinctly seen, than while they remain united and incorporated with one another in the sun. Just so it is with the divine nature: it is one simple undivided perfection in the Godhead himself; but when refracted and divaricated in passing through the human mind, it becomes power, justice, mercy, which are separately and adequately represented to the understanding." The amazing perfections of the divine character are indeed inexhaustible and incomprehensible; and we can, at the utmost stretch, form a most obscure and imperfect conception of them, drawn from some observable or supposed correspondency in our frail and erring selves, in this our earthly state. We can have no conception of those attributes of God which have no correspondency with this earthly sphere—with that "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive." One thing is certain, that it is "goodness*" that finishes the idea of God, and represents him to us under that lovely character, of being the best, as well as the greatest being of the universe.—Immense and eternal goodness—all-powerful and all-wise—goodness invested with supreme dominion, and tempering the rigour of unrelenting justice." "There is none good (says our Saviour) but one, that is God."†

Again,—if we suppose the doctrine of eternal punishment to be part of Christianity, and part of

* Clarke, vol. i. p. 90.

† Mark x. 18.

the plan of a wise, merciful, omnipotent God, then it must have the same confirmation with the whole scheme of our religion, and be certainly revealed in Scripture ;—and, were this the case, we should have the evidence of miracles, founded on a satisfactory examination, in support of a doctrine contradictory of our apprehensions of right and wrong—of a doctrine that is, we conceive, inconsistent with, and contradictory of, both natural reason and rational notions of the Deity. And the question would come to this, whether a man can give any saving faith to any revelation, if you will,—and withhold his assent from the evidence of his reason and of his moral sense,—shall he believe his reason and his moral sense, giving evidence of our natural notions of a Deity, who has not left himself without a witness in every man's breast—or shall he believe a supposed part of revelation, explained and expounded, contradictory of these notions?

But the doctrine of eternal punishment, if revealed at all, is, at any rate, not clearly revealed in Scripture, (where the believer must look for an explicit state of the consequences of his disobedience) ;—and we have the absolute evidence of our moral sense, and our natural notions of the Deity, to support us against the supposed inference of this “horrible decree” of Calvin.^g The evidence against the doctrine preponderates ; and it is impossible for a moral and accountable being to give credit to a doctrine as of God, when the difficulties and objections against it are stronger than the evidence by

which it is supported. If any one tells me that God is just, omnipotent, and merciful, and yet that he hath *ordained* some to eternal punishments, I must deny the compatibility of the positions; and I rejoice to believe, (although I see not the way of it,) to use the language of an accomplished writer, “that the happy consummation which I desire is appointed, and must come to pass; but that when it is to come depends upon the obedience of man to the will of God.”*

Our subject does not require me to enter into any metaphysical discussion relative to the nature of the soul. It is only necessary to premise, as a principle flowing from the admission of one uncreated first cause, that it is a creation, and consequently, though it may be, and is, we believe, immortal, that implies merely that it is naturally so. It is not necessarily immortal and eternal, in the sense in which the Deity is, who can “kill both soul and body,” but would be, like all creation, subject to decay, were it not sustained by the communicated influence of divine grace, or continued by the absolute power of the Creator. In God there is an impossibility of dying,—in the soul of man only a possibility of not dying. “Who ever taught (asks Mr. Clark† of Mr. Dodwell) any other immortality of the soul than a precarious one,—that is, depending upon the pleasure of God Almighty?

* Southey's Colloquies, vol. i. p. 28, 160.

† Works, vol. iii. p. 722, 737.

or who ever imagined that any thing which was *γεννητον*, and had a beginning, was not capable of being destroyed and having an end, if God should so please?" Now, the doctrine of eternal punishment infers generally, that the Creator *continues* and *sustains* the created in an immortality of suffering.ⁱ "It is remarkable (says Jeremy Taylor), when our blessed Saviour gave us caution, that we should not fear him that can kill the body only, but fear him (he says not that can kill the soul, but *τον δυναμενον και ψυχην και σωμα απωλεσαι εν γεννη.*) that is able to destroy the body and soul in hell, which word signifieth not death, *but tortures.*"*^k Indeed St. Paul† assures us, that the "King of Kings only hath immortality";—and this eternity of life we can only arrive at in our regenerated state, through the *sustaining* power of God,—or, in Scriptural language, "being‡ born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Jeremy Taylor,§ in another part of his writings, as if to meet the drift and consequence of the reasoning we are now pursuing (the incompatibility of the attributes of the Deity with the eternity of future punishment), has it, that God did not design the evil portions in the next world;—"he did not at all intend it for man—

* Discourses, vol. ii. p. 345.—The Annihilists may dispute this interpretation; but it is not necessary for our present purpose to examine it.

† 1 Tim. vi. 16.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 23.

§ Disc. vol. i. p. 56.

but man would imitate the devil's pride,—and then God, also, against his first design, resolved to throw such persons into that place that was prepared for the devil." While Dr. South,* in reasoning of God's decrees, observed, "there can be no new emergent inconvenience that may unframe his resolutions and cause a change."¹ I shall not here stop to discuss these contradictory passages, inasmuch as they touch not the inference we are reaching,—that the soul is not necessarily immortal; and can, and shall, after death, be continued in an immortality, whether of misery or of happiness, solely through the power and influence of Almighty God. "Whereby† are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that *by these* ye might be partakers of the divine nature." "And‡ this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life."

* Works, 8vo. vol: vii. p. 383,—on Gen. vi. 3.

† 2 Pet. i. 4.

‡ 1 John, v. 11.

LETTER IX.

“ With the reasonable Christian, examination precedes assent :
the accuracy of that examination is always suited to the
importance of the subject ; and the degree of that assent to
the probability of the evidence.” *Parr.*

“ Yet thro’ the wastes of the trackless air
Ye have a guide, and shall *we* despair?
Ye over desert and deep have pass’d,—
So may *we* reach our bright home at last.”
Hemans.

I now proceed to examine the point more immediately before us ; but it is yet necessary to trespass on the indulgence of the reader, while I premise a few words relative to the interpretation of Scripture. And, first, I would observe, in the language of Priestly,* (a proof, perhaps, it may be thought, how much better men can preach than practise,) that “ when we inquire into the doctrine of any book, or set of books, concerning any subject, and particular passages are alleged in favour of different opinions, we should chiefly consider what is the general tenour of the whole work with respect to it, or what

* Introduction to Early Opinions concerning Christianity.

impression it would probably make on an impartial reader." Be this as it may, religion,^a at any rate, it will be admitted, is a reasonable service, founded in a regard to the improvement and happiness of the created. It discovers, and can discover, nothing contradictory^b of intuitive moral truth—of our moral obligations, which existed prior to and are independent whether of the Jewish or Christian dispensations—upon which indeed they are both founded,—although the latter assuredly established a more extended and sublime standard, and exhibited a more perfect and exalted pattern. Even "a miracle (it is somewhere said) could not establish a general principle, at open variance with clear intimations, arising from the light of reason and of conscience," and from the visible ordinations of Providence,—for it cannot be supposed that "God should commission any to enervate his own fundamental law, and by one will to contradict another."

Nor is any doctrine to be received, which, when fairly interpreted and clearly understood, is palpably opposed to our moral sense. I do not say that a doctrine is to be rejected because it could not have been discovered by reason, or because I cannot understand its exact mode of operation, or because it may be attended with difficulties which I cannot explain; but I do say, that what is palpably and intelligibly contradictory of the moral sense—of intuitive truth—of the moral fitness, and proportion, and congruity of things—of that which enables me to know that any thing is what it is, just or unjust,

proportionate or disproportionate, fit or unfit, becoming or unbecoming—can be no part of a revelation from God applicable to a reasonable being. “Whatever (says Stillingfleet*) speaks a direct repugnancy to any of the fundamental dictates of nature, cannot be of divine revelation.” If the contrary be maintained, then is Scripture a dead letter as to all reasonable motives of belief,—for, if reason be given to enable me to judge of the general principle, and I am at the same time required to assent to propositions subversive and contradictory of reason and of the moral sense, the whole light of reason and of conscience is benighted; and I may grope in the dark for the ordinations of Providence, and stumble on any creed which the sophistry of priest-craft, the errors of lay-craft, or the policy of state-craft, may invent.

Moreover, when we consider the apparent contradictions^c in Scripture, it is impossible not to conclude, from their frequency, that they were intentional,—as evincing the required necessity of that sincere, sober, and candid scrutiny which Christianity demands of a rational agent, for the discovery of her precepts,—and by inference of those principles which are set before us, not certainly that we may torture any particular passage into utter unmeaningness, or into words of defence or palliation for our particular errors or individual aberrations,—but that we may elicit the admonitory

* Stillingfleet, vol. i. p. 197.—Or. Sac.

substance of it, by reasonable deduction, as a principle for the guidance and practical improvement of our lives.

It is farther apparent, that if, in prelecting here, on subjects purely moral and intellectual, it is yet necessary to have recourse to analogy to aid our imperfect understanding, much more is it required to assist our conceptions when speaking of things pertaining to the next life. In truth we are like the blind, groping in pursuit of the knowledge of the visible ; and the Being that would open up to us, views of the invisible, must proceed by such analogical representations as we can apprehend ;—just as we endeavour to convey to the blind, however inadequately, something of that information which the eye affords to us. It is clear also, that evident contradictions cannot be both true—the metaphors cannot be strictly interpreted, if obviously opposite ; and the inference is to be obtained by the fair use of our reasoning faculties and moral apprehensions, in accordance with, or at any rate not contradictory of, the general tenour of Scripture, and the attributes of the Deity.

“ If any man come to me, and hate not (says our Saviour) his father and mother, and wife and children, he cannot be my disciple.”* Again (says the same authority), “ he that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.”† On the other hand, St. Paul declares that “ He who

* Luke xiv. 26, 33.

† Matt. x. 37.

provideth not for his own house is worse than an infidel.”* Literally interpreted, then, were our Lord’s first injunction to be followed, (which is impossible,) the world would be a scene of heartless hypocrisy ; for St. Paul’s assertion is undeniable—such a one must be “ worse than an infidel.” A man of common sense will, however, expound the precept reasonably,—and he will be led to the conclusion that our Lord speaks comparatively—that all the objects of this life, in contrast with those of another, are as nothing, and must be disregarded when they interfere with our interests in eternity. †

In the parable of the virgins, ‡ the King says,—“ Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit ye the kingdom of heaven ;” and the reasons are added, in the 35th and 36th verses,—“ For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” Unto them on the left hand, however, the King said,—“ Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire ;” and the reasons are just the converse,—“ For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me not in : naked, and ye clothed me not : sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.” Now, here, charity, and

* Tim. v. 8.

† See Chillingworth’s Works, vol. i. p. 69.

‡ Matt. xxv.

charity only, is, by our Saviour, made the one thing needful to salvation: but, if we turn to St. Mark, we are told, “He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved;”* and St. Paul has it, “By grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves,—it is the gift of God.”† Again, James, in his second epistle, would appear to contradict both his Master and his Apostle,—for he assures us, that “faith without works is dead.” Abraham, he tells us, was “justified by works.” “A man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” Turn we to St. Paul again:‡—we are informed, on the contrary, “if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God.”—“Abraham§ believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”—“Being justified by faith (saith the Apostle elsewhere||), we have peace with God.”—“A man is justified by faith.”¶—“The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”** Here is abundant trial for the exercise of our reasoning faculties; and what is the conclusion of common sense? Not, certainly, that charity alone is the only one thing needful, (although it covereth a multitude of sins;) for a profligate may be actively charitable;—not that faith without works, or works without faith, can be sufficient—not that belief and

* Mark xvi. 16.

† Eph. ii. 8.

‡ Rom. iv. 2, 3.

§ See Benson on Scripture Difficulties.

|| Rom. v.

¶ Rom. iii.

** Gal. iii.

baptism are the only requisites ;—for all this would be positively absurd. And we are no more at liberty to repudiate the moral law, written in the heart of man, than the divine law, (which, in truth, is one and the same,) written in the Bible of God. But the reasonable conclusion is, that, if good works are an essential and vital part of the duty of a Christian, so is trust and faith in God, and belief in Christ—not a speculative barren faith, (touching a particular mystery, which we neither understand ourselves, or can explain to others,—and which, it is therefore reasonable to conclude, was not meant to be, and cannot be, comprehensible by our limited faculties ;) but a faith productive of active benevolence and duty, in the various relations and positions of a rational and accountable life. Again, “ Do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your father ;” * and yet, “ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,” † says the same Evangelist.—Assuredly shew our “ good works,” when the influence of our example can benefit others—for this is doing good ; but not, certainly, send a crier to proclaim them, merely for the gratification of personal ostentation—for this were contemptible vanity.

“ If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.” ‡—Not certainly to be literally interpreted, but admonitory ; to clear our progress, as it

* Matt. vi. 1.

† Matt. v. 16.

‡ Matt. xviii. 9.

were, by excision of all minor obstacles, to advancement in holiness.

“No man knoweth the Son, but the Father ;—and who the Father is, but the Son ;”—yet, “from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him ;”—“the Father is in me, and I in him :”—“I and the Father are one. *” Strictly interpreted, all this would seem contradictory ; which cannot be : and, humbly and rationally, our common understanding explains the passages (intelligible only) as declaring the incomprehensibility to us of the divine and ineffable nature of the Godhead.^d

“I determined (says St. Paul), *not* to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”[†] A man of candour will not interpret this sweeping sentence as disclaiming all knowledge of God, or of aught else save Christ crucified, as literally it imports ; but, recollecting that, in the language of the Bible, “not to know,” and not to speak of a thing, are synonymous, he recognizes the learned Apostle, in this particular instance, and under the peculiar circumstances, determined to exhibit no other knowledge, and disclaiming every assistance, save the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the preaching of him crucified for the sins of men.[§]

“Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall

* Matt. xi. 27.—Luke x. 22.—John x. 30, 38 ; xiv. 7.

† 1. Cor. ii. 2.

‡ See 1 Cor. ii. 5.—Macknight.—Gleig's History of the Bible, vol. ii. p. 321.

we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the kingdom of heaven.”*—Implying not, certainly, recklessness,—but the pervading truth inculcated in every page of Scripture, that all things are ordered, and ought to be subservient to the advancement of spiritual life and holiness. “And all these things shall be added unto you :”—not, assuredly, necessarily, or in an unrestricted sense; but in so far as they are conducive, and may reasonably be supposed to lead to our spiritual good, associated with the reasonable discharge of our duty, in our endeavours to obtain them. Nor are we to imagine, that “all we ask in the name of Jesus” shall be granted without discrimination;—but what a conscientious follower of the commandments of God can reasonably beg for his spiritual welfare,—the great end of Scriptural discipline. The “thorn in the flesh” may not be removed, because, by its continuance, the spiritual remedy—the good, the primary benefit of preparation for another life, contemplated by the whole mechanism of the gospel,—may be promoted.

“I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice.” †—Not, certainly, that Abraham could undertake for those who were to come after him,—but that he should

* Matt. vi. 31, 33.

† Gen. xviii. 19.

set before their eyes the obligations required, of devotion to the one only true God, and righteousness and justice to man.

“Thou shalt keep my covenant, thou and thy seed after thee, in their generations.—Every man-child among you, that is eight days old, shall be circumcised:—for an everlasting covenant.—And the man-child (who is not circumcised,) that soul shall be cut off from his people;—he hath broken my covenant.”*—Now, a child of eight days old could neither make nor break a covenant; but the meaning is, that, being admitted to a participation of it without his consent, by a particular ceremony, if he afterwards refused to perform the conditions of it, he should not derive any of the advantages.

“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”† When these words were spoken, miraculous gifts of faith were conceded to the disciples of Christ; but, in the present day, they can only be understood as implying, that the most difficult exertions, and the most painful struggles, can be *cheerfully* made by him possessed of this qualification, because these bear no sort of proportion to the divine promises regarding the life to come.

“Every *idle* word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof at the day of judgment.”‡—Every word, *morally* evil, no doubt;—

* See Gen. xvii. 9, 14.

† Mark ix. 23.

‡ Matt. xii 36.

but, certainly, not every expression of harmless pleasantry, calculated to while away a tedious, or, peradventure, to amuse a painful hour.

God gave Canaan to Abraham, for an everlasting inheritance.—But (as is asked by Sherlock*), “does any thing in this world deserve the title of an inheritance—much less of an everlasting inheritance? Can there be any such thing in such a mutable and changeable scene?” Certainly not ;—and we read the land of Canaan as prefiguring the inheritance of the kingdom of God.

I cite not these chance passages (and others are at hand), in order to afford me an opportunity of detailing the various explanations which have been given of them, or to shew how easily they may be reconciled by a willing mind, and the fair application of our common understanding, (without which many may be turned into utter nonsense ;)—but simply to illustrate the principle which seems to pervade Scriptural information, that of exhibiting apparent doubts and contradictions,—enticing us to investigation, as it were, in order to lead us to exercise our intellectual capacities, and to determine us to that discipline of mind which (as well as labour of body) is our portion in this life ; obliging us to have recourse to the moral sense and common understanding of man, when seeming difficulties present themselves ; and, by a candid, and earnest, and sincere use of our faculties, which are not less

* On the Immortality of the Soul, p. 175.

the gift of God than the Bible itself, to correct these supposed inconsistencies, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, and ultimately to instruct us, by evolving the admonitory substance of the whole.

Applying, therefore, the same principles in the exposition of the threatened punishment of the wicked; it is clear, we observe, beyond controversy, that when metaphors are used, and these necessarily contradictory, they cannot by any possibility be both true; and can, at furthest, only be intended to convey to us, by analogical representation, drawn from the things of this life, such degree of suffering and punishment as is consistent with the metaphorical import of the images, or as it is requisite or expedient to represent to us.^e

Unquestionably he who explains away these threatenings altogether errs, and has no ground for his indifference; but equally, as it appears to me, does he misinterpret, who expands them beyond a fair and reasonable inference;—because it is impossible to doubt, that any doctrine so revolting to our natural notions as the eternity of any punishment, must have been revealed, if revealed at all, in the fullest and clearest manner.* If, however, we examine the passage in question, by the side of others apparently inconsistent with, and contradictory of it,—observing the principle of improvement intended, the caution suggested, and the general

* St. Paul tells us, “The Spirit speaketh expressly.”—See Deut. xxix. 29.—1 Tim. iv. 1.—Ezek. i. 3.

scope of God's laws involved,—we have reason to believe that we may arrive at the fair import, in so far as it was meant to bear upon our lives here, or our hopes hereafter.

But, if we torture passages (which in every instance may be met by others of opposing signification, or which are in themselves, or in their import and construction, doubtful) into positive unvarying denunciations of eternal damnation, do we not, so far from permitting them to operate as admonitions for our improvement,—as problems for the exercise of our capacities,—as admonitory cautions for reasonable and devout fear, transmute them into thoughts painfully alarming, and revoltingly disgusting, which lead us insensibly to withdraw our meditations with aversion from their dismal apprehensions, or drive us into recklessness from the consideration of their realities. If, on the other hand, we apply to them the use of our reasoning faculties, and expound them at any rate in a possible and conceivable sense—in short, look to them as beacons hung out for our direction—as prohibitory cautions, implying the full and rational import of the metaphor in which they are conveyed—and with all the full and fair (because conceivable) extent of the danger to be avoided—but without contradiction of other passages, and in harmony with the general tenour of the whole, (thus giving to them the felt and moral force of an acquiescence in their justness,)—are we not striving to educe from them those salutary principles of controul which they are

calculated and seem to have been intended to afford. I presume not to push my humble faculties into dangerous latitudes, which Providence never intended us to explore ; but I cannot persuade myself that the general scope of the gospel is not to be read by a fair and candid mind. The Founder of Christianity addressed himself to the common understanding and experience of men ; and his directions are obviously the result of the most intimate knowledge of the human character.—Hence, if to teach us how to live well be the great object of Ethics, the best system the world has yet produced is to be found in his morals ; and if the paramount aim of wisdom be “ to know ourselves,” that information is to be obtained unerringly only in the *deep philosophy* (I say it advisedly) of his lessons.

LETTER X.

“ However, since the written word of God is our entire rule of faith,—and since, provided a doctrine so important as this is, be indeed true, we must assuredly find very clear and distinct traces of it in Scripture,—I will make it my first and immediate business to inquire, whether, by any texts directly affirming it, or leaving it to be indirectly inferred, such Scriptural authority does really exist.”

D'Oyly.

“ Earth's cities had no sound nor tread,
And ships were drifting with the dead,
To shores where all was dumb.”

Campbell.

LET us now consider the arguments in this case on either side :

First,—derived from Scripture.

Second,—from the nature of evil.

The doctrine of eternal punishment is mainly founded on those passages of Scripture which declare, that “ the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment ;—but the righteous into life eternal,” (or everlasting.)* Now, it is obvious that

* Daniel xii. 2.—Matt. xxv. 41, 46.—Mark iii. 29.—2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9.—Jude 6, 7.

the whole strength of these passages lies in the acceptance of the word “everlasting;”^a and if the reader will turn to Genesis,* he will find that the same word is applied to the land of Canaan, as an “everlasting possession,”—and to the covenant of circumcision, as an “everlasting covenant,”—although the former shall, like all things earthly, pass away; and the latter is abolished. We read also of the “everlasting mountains,” and of the “everlasting gospel:”†—yet the former shall dissolve, and the latter cease, when its purposes are fulfilled. So, in Leviticus,‡ the precept of offering the first-fruits is called “a statute for ever;” and that of the Passover,§ where a similar expression (“an ordinance for ever”) is used.^b Hence, says Stillingfleet,|| the Jews inferred, “that no alteration can happen to the ceremonial law, since God himself has declared that it shall continue for ever.” But to this it is replied, he adds, that the “word in which the main force of the argument lies doth not carry with it an absolute perpetuity, but it signifies according to the subject it is joined with; so, when it is applied to God, it signifies eternity, not so much from the mere importance of the word as from the necessary existence of the divine nature.” Nay, adds he, “it is so far from signifying a necessary perpetuity, that it is applied to such things as even

* xvii. 7, 8, 13; and xlviii. 3, 4.

† Hab. iii. 6.—Rev. xiv. 6.

‡ xxiii. 14.

§ Exodus, xii. 17.

|| Or. Sac. vol. i. p. 247—249.

have no long duration, as, Exodus xxi. 6, ‘ And he shall serve him for ever,’—that is,” adds Stillingfleet, “ (as the Jews themselves expound it,) to the next Jubilee, though it were near or far off. So in 1 Samuel,* where Samuel is said to abide before the Lord ‘ for ever’.”

Again, we are told of the endless torments of the wicked, from the words “ for ever and ever,” as found in Revelations xiv. 11, xix. 3, xx. 10 ; but if we refer to Isaiah xxx. 8, and Jeremiah vii. 7, xxv. 5, we find the same words applied to limited duration :—“ Write it before them in a table, and note it in a book,—that it may be for the time to come, for ever and ever.”—So in Ecclesiastes i. 4, Psalm civ, 5.

Jesus, it is said, “ sat down on the right hand of God, for ever ;”† yet he will come again.‡ “ For they themselves shew of us,—how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God;—and to wait for his Son from heaven.”§

The throne of Christ is declared to be “ for ever and ever ;”|| yet it must end, “ when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God.”¶

The doctrine of endless punishment is founded also on the fire that is “ never to be quenched,” and “ the worm that dieth not ;”** but if we turn to

* 1 Samuel i. 22.

† Heb. x. 12.

‡ Phil. iii. 20.

§ See 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

|| Heb. i. 8.

¶ 1 Cor. xv. 24—28.

** Mark ix. 44.

Leviticus,* we read of the fire burning upon the altar, which shall “never go out;” yet this fire hath gone out, for the Messiah caused “the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.”† Again,‡ the fire to consume Jerusalem, which shall “not be quenched,” is threatened; yet this fire, that shall “not be quenched,” hath ceased; and Jerusalem is at this moment inhabited, and shall be more flourishing than ever.§

We read, too, “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.”|| Here the whole import, in so far as duration is concerned, hangs on the reduplication “for ever and ever,” which we have already noticed; and the expression is clearly metaphorical,—conveying limited duration; for the smoke can only last so long as the substance from which it is evolved burns: and we cannot conceive that any substance can burn to perpetuity, without loss of parts, which here are perpetually evaporating and ascending:—“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out.”¶ Isaiah** uses the metaphor in a limited sense,—where (when speaking of the judgments of God, and of the land of Bozrah) we are assured, among other things, that the fire, the instrument of its desolation, “shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever:” yet, subsequently, we are told, that the wild

* Lev. vi. 12, 13.

† Daniel ix. 27.

‡ Ezek. xx. 48.

§ Isaiah lx. 16; lxii. 4.—Ezek. xvi, 60.

|| Rev. xiv. 11.

¶ Prov. xxvi. 20.

** Isaiah xxxiv. 2—17.

beasts and birds of the desert “shall possess it for ever;—from generation to generation shall they dwell in it.” Now, be the import of the prophecy what you will, it is clear that the language implies limited duration; for the fire must be quenched, and the smoke cease, before bird or beast could possess and “dwell in it;”—neither can bird or beast possess any thing “for ever.”

Again, “Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”* Some infer from this, eternal punishments—the Catholics, Purgatory; and if I could agree with either, it would be with the latter—for it is at least evident, that you shall come out when you have paid the last farthing, and your ability to do so is implied in the act of incarceration spoken of in the preceding verse; from which, and from what is subsequently said,† it would seem that the Evangelist speaks in illustration, and with reference to the things of this life, the promotion of concord and harmony, and the avoiding of strife and litigation, by the evils and terrors of the temporal law.

Endless punishment is allotted to those guilty of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—that is, ascribing the miracles of Christ to the power of the devil.‡^c Now, here is an unpardonable offence, (“a sin unto death,”) which shall assuredly be

* Matt. v. 26.

† xviii. 34.—See also Luke xii. 58, 59.

‡ Matt. xii. 31, 32.—Mark iii. 28, 29.—Luke xii. 10.—

l John v. 16.

visited with punishment of the highest nature. The offender “hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.” Still the exact inference is to be elicited from the fair and legitimate interpretation of the word “eternal,” which we have already adverted to, as not invariably applied in Scripture to an eternity, properly so called. And, if our reasoning be correct, the whole import of the commination is, that the offender shall be subject to the ultimate consequences of sin—the further punishment of wickedness and wicked men, *after* the advent of our Saviour—the torments of the second death—the lake of fire into which the wicked shall be cast;—having never forgiveness (as the Evangelist is made to express it), neither in this world, neither in the world to come; or, according to the original, (as the word is usually translated,) neither in this eternity, nor in the eternity to come,—or, as some will have it, neither in this age, nor in the age to come; but, in any view, inferring limit, which is the main point, (for there cannot be two eternities:^d)—thus confining the punishment to that state of existence after the advent of Christ, yet *before* “he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, who shall be all in all.” And this interpretation is, we apprehend, in accordance with Scripture, and without which many passages (as of Isaiah xxv. 8, Hosea xiii. 14, 1 Cor. xv. 26, 28,) are unintelligible, where we are positively assured that death shall be “swallowed up in victory,” and that it shall be finally destroyed. “The

sting of death is sin," but Christ came that he "might destroy the works of the devil,"—necessarily inferring that all suffering, the consequence of sin, the work of the devil, must cease with the cause producing it. "That as sin hath reigned unto death (it is not written eternal death), even so might grace reign through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."* For, a time is coming when "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."† Now, be the period of duration of suffering stated by the Evangelists what it may, it seems clear that it must imply a termination, unless we throw aside other passages of Scripture, which, as we have seen, are only to be understood by its implying something at any rate short of a metaphysical eternity.

Indeed, in the Apocalypse, we are told that the wicked, in their several varieties, "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death;"‡ but, waving the finite import of the metaphor, we have to oppose to this the fourth verse of the same chapter, (which we have before given,) where a state is indicated beyond all death, beyond all sorrow, and

* Rom. v. 21.—See also 1 John iii. 8; Heb. ii. 14; Rom.

viii. 6.

† Rev. xxi. 4.

‡ Rev. xxi. 8.

beyond all suffering. “ There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.” e

Happy ! thrice happy, the man ! who, raising his thoughts above this cold and jarring scene of disappointment, and reposing on the beatific vision of the inspired Prophet, can enjoy the shadowy longings of his aspirations, assuming, like palpable realities, the substance and the form of this glorious consummation,—when “ the former things shall have passed away,” and a merciful God having wiped all tears from our eyes,—

“ The soul, enlarged from its vile bonds, will mount
And range the starry orbs, and milky-ways,
Of that refulgent world, where we shall swim
In liquid light, and float on seas of bliss.’

LETTER XI.

“No man thoroughly understands the whole of the Christian Revelation ; and, therefore, no man assents to it, except with a general implicit assent.” *Erskine.*

“The face of the earth hath madden’d me, and I
Take refuge in her mysteries, and pierce
To the abodes of those who govern her.”
Manfred.

THERE is an awful mystery thrown over these visions of the Apocalypse ; and the term “second death” (δευτερος θανατος) may excite the apprehensions of the most unthinking ; and, although somewhat out of place, we must consider the subject a little further.

First,—The second death cannot import annihilation, for after it there shall be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It is then, evidently, a transition into some other state, be that state what it may,—and as to duration, finite or infinite.

Second,—What is meant by the second death we must collect from Revelations.* On them that

* Rev. xx. 6, 14, 15 ; xxi. 8.

“ have part in the first resurrection, the second death hath no power.” Death and hell (*ᾠδης*, i. e. the “ mansion of the dead, having no relation to vice or virtue, reward or punishment”) “ were cast into the lake of fire—this is the second death.” Sinners, we are assured, “ shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone,—which is the second death.” The second death then is, the punishment of wicked men after the day of judgment; and it cannot be annihilation,—for our Saviour expressly says, that *there* shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. It is beyond all question, therefore, a transition into a state of suffering,—but for what period of duration?

Now, it is admitted that the wicked shall suffer in the next world, and it is apprehended that they shall endure a “ second death;” but it is maintained, that the Scriptures contain no unequivocal expressions as to any eternity of punishment. “ It is (says St. Paul) appointed unto men *once* to die,—after this the judgment;”^a but the wicked shall die (St. John informs us) “ a *second death*.” Now, in the absence of clear and explicit revelation, I ask whether, since we have two deaths mentioned in Scripture, and whether, since the first death precedes a resurrection and a judgment—I ask, I say, whether in such a case, and under such a similitude of expression, it be not more reasonable to conclude that the second death will also precede

• Heb. ix. 27.

a resurrection and judgment, or transition into a better state? A twofold resurrection is not an unsupported doctrine, as the reader may suppose; for several of the ancient Fathers have acknowledged it,—“the first as that which is to precede the reign of the Messiah,—the second as that which is to follow his reign.”* b

God forbid that so fallible an individual as I am should indulge in the odious sin of presumption; but I put it to common sense, guided by fair analogies, whether this be the more reasonable, as it certainly is the more intelligible, conclusion;—or, that the wicked are cast into the lake of fire—the second death—there to suffer through the countless periods of eternity;—an inference not only confessedly unintelligible, but clearly opposed to all our natural notions, and founded, at the most, on equivocal expressions of Scripture. “And I saw the dead, (continues the vision,) small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”† In the next chapter, the vision proceeds, “And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from

* Calmet's Dictionary, vol. ii. p. 539.

† Rev. xx. 12.

their eyes, (not certainly from the eyes of the blessed, for they are assuredly beyond weeping;) and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Now the reader will bear in mind, that this is figurative of a state *after* "the dead were judged;" and we are previously informed, "that death and Hades (*i. e.* the place of the dead) were cast into the lake."

It is clear, therefore, that the first death,* which all men are appointed to suffer, had passed,—and that the second death is here spoken of; and this is confirmed by the general inference,—“There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.”

Now it is, I apprehend, impossible to admit the integrity of these asseverations, in conjunction with a knowledge in the mind of the Prophet of the existence, present or future, of millions, in eternal and exquisite torments. Or, if it be contended that, although “there shall be no more death,” since “death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire,” still the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels is in reservation, where the wicked shall be tormented “day and night, for ever and ever:”—I must still, in explanation, beg the reader’s attention.

We have already ascertained the limited force of

* See preceding Note. a.

the reduplication "for ever and ever," when applied to perishable things; but here we wish to restrict the argument to the words of the vision:—Death and Hades (*i. e.* the mansion or state of the dead) are, we are told, "cast into the lake of fire," clearly implying that death and the state of the dead are destroyed. Independently of the assurance, before given, that there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, we have before seen also, that the death here spoken of is the second death, *i. e.* the punishment of wicked men after the day of judgment.

Now, if death and the state of the dead, and the punishment of wicked men after the day of judgment, be destroyed, what have we left? "The lake of fire and brimstone." It is surely unnecessary to push the consequence further; and I am not disposed to trifle.

But if, in regard to the expression second death, "the punishment of wicked men after the day of judgment," (as Tillotson has it,) divines are agreed, there seems some discrepancy in fixing the import of Hades; and Barrow,* in his exposition of the Creed, "He descended into hell," finds it attended with considerable difficulty. Without, however, wearying the reader, by any unnecessary investigation, I may observe, that the meaning we have given appears, from the following passages,

* Sermon xxviii.—See also Secker, Lec. ix.

to be the Scriptural one, and it coincides with the sense attributed to the word by Heathen writers.

First,—That Hades is a place of punishment is evinced from the passage of Luke xvi. 23, “ And in Hades (the unseen state, translated by us in this passage “ hell,”) the rich man lifted up his eyes, being in torments.”

Second,—The latter part of the verse, and the two following, are equally conclusive that it implies also the place of the happy after death. “ The rich man seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom ; and he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me,” &c.,—“ for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said,” &c.,—“ Now Lazarus is comforted, but thou art tormented.” It is unnecessary to multiply quotations. “ Among all the nations, whether Heathens, Jews, or Christians, the usual acceptation of hell was, that it was the common lodge or habitation of separate souls, both good and bad, where each of them, according to their deserts in this life, and their expectation of the future judgment, remained either in joy or misery.”* Socrates resists the entreaties of Crito to attempt an escape, and defends his adherence to justice on the ground that he may be able to justify his conduct when he arrives in Hades,† that is, the world of departed spirits. c

* See King's History of the Apostle's Creed.

† See the Crito of Plato.

It is of no moment, however, to our present reasoning, whether we translate Hades, according to some, as the grave simply,—or, according to a host of authorities, more correctly, as we apprehend, as the place of departed spirits—the dead, good and bad,—for the passage unequivocally imports, that death, *i. e.* the second death, (or the punishment of the wicked,) and the grave, (or the place of the dead,) are destroyed. They have reached the ultimate and final state of happiness, and have left the intermediate stage (whatever it be) in which they had existed. “I will ransom thee (says Hosea*) from the power of the grave; I will redeem thee from death: O death, I will be thy plagues, (or dissolution, as it is translated by some;) O grave, (or hell,) I will be thy destruction.” “The last enemy (says St. Paul†) that shall be destroyed is death.” For “every creature, (according to St. John,‡) which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I, saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever.” If hell be destroyed—if the *last* enemy be destroyed—we can have no more last enemies to combat; and if every creature, without exception, through the wide range of universal creation, be singing praises to Almighty

* Hosea xiii. 14.

† 1 Cor. xv. 26.

‡ Rev. v. 13.

God, what becomes of the wailings, of the sorrowing, and the howlings of the damned—transmuted, as we read the language of inspiration, by the redeeming plan of a merciful Creator, into songs and hallelujahs of gladness and of glory.

LETTER XII.

“ ‘ He descended into hell.’—Whatever is meant by this, I think we may be certain that it is not the place of torment which usually goes by that name. It *possibly* means that place where the souls of the dead reside during the separation from the body, between the times of death and judgment.”

Haggitt.

“ Oh, earth!

Where are the past?—and whereon had they birth?
The dead are thy inheritors,—and we
But bubbles on thy surface : and the key
Of this profundity is in the grave,
The ebon portal of thy peopled cave,
Where I would walk in spirit, and behold
Our elements resolved to things untold,—
And fathom hidden wonders, and explore
The essence of great bosoms now no more.”

Byron.

As to these words “ He descended into hell,”^a there is, I am aware, a world of logomachy. It is maintained by some that this merely signifies, he descended into the grave. What we have said will, I apprehend, satisfy the reader, that Hades signifies generally the mansions of the dead, good and bad : and here the restricted signification of the grave is

sufficiently repelled by considering the words of the Creed,—“ Was crucified, dead, and buried : he descended into the grave.” We are here previously told he was buried, and it would be worse than tautology to add, in the next paragraph, the same information. It is clear in so far, then, from this alone, that Hades here signifies more than the grave,—he descended into hell, *i. e.* into the place of departed spirits, good and bad. “ Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,”—“ His soul was not left in hell,”*—are clear implications that the soul of Jesus was in hell ; for to talk of leaving that (in any place) which was never there, is on the face of it nonsense. But not to weary the reader, I shall only refer to the opinions of Barrow, Beveridge, and Burnett. “ If we do interpret (says the first†) the descent into hell here affirmed of our Saviour’s interment, or being laid in the bosom of that universal grave we before spoke of, or if, in a notion little differing from that, we take these words for a phrase (taking its ground in the manner before mentioned) importing no otherwise, than when it was spoken of Jacob and others, that our Saviour did really pass into the state of death ; we are sure therein not to err, the proposition so understood being most certainly true.” Bishop Beveridge, on the Thirty-nine Articles, is more clear and particular—“ As Christ died for us, and was buried ; so also it is to be believed that he went down to hell ;—though this

* Acts ii. 27, 31.

† Vol. i. p. 446.

article, (adds he) be in itself as clear and certain as any of the next, yet men having exercised their fancies so variously upon it, have drawn, as it were, a veil over it, and eclipsed the light of it ; and hence it is, that some do not rightly understand it—others scruple it—yea, and others do in plain terms contradict and gainsay it. That Christ descended into hell is not a truth of yesterday's growth ; but almost all the Fathers of the primitive Church have acknowledged and received it as an article of their faith." And in this opinion Bishop Burnett, in a very short and clear exposition, seems to concur. " It imports (says he*) that he was not only dead in a mere common acceptation, as it is usual to say a man is dead when there appear no signs of life in him, and that he was not in a deep extacy or fit, that seemed death, but that he was truly dead ; that his soul was neither in his body, nor hovering about it, ascending and descending upon it, as some of the Jews fancied souls did for some time after death, but that his soul was really removed out of his body, and carried to those unseen regions of departed spirits, among whom it continued till his resurrection."

Again, the preaching to the spirits in prison has been differently interpreted. " The spirits in prison (says Burnett†) were the Gentiles who were shut up in idolatry, as in a prison." It is perhaps immaterial to fix the precise sense in which these

* On the Thirty-nine Art. fol. p. 58.

† P. 57.

words may be understood ; but it is at any rate unnecessary to look for any recondite or metaphorical meaning, when the plain interpretation is more apparent.

Spirits here are those in a disembodied state. They were the “sometime disobedient,”* according to St. Peter ; and “for this cause (says he) was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, (in a bodily sense) that they might be judged,” &c. To which we may add the assurance of St. Paul,† that our Saviour descended into “the lower parts of the earth ;” and of Acts,‡ “whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death ; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” Here it is intimated that Christ rose from the dead because he could not “be holden of it ;” and the business he accomplished was to loose “the pains of death.” Now, I apprehend, loosing the pains of death, can imply nothing more than opening by his means, or preaching, or what you will, the deliverance of its inhabitants, at the period of his descent. Calvin^b § and others, I am aware, have it, that our Saviour went down to the place of torment, and there suffered the pains of a reprobate spirit. Bishop Horsley,|| in my opinion, so far

* See 1 Peter iv. 6 ; iii. 18—20.

† Ephes. iv. 9.

‡ Acts ii. 24.

§ See Inst. lib. ii. sect. 10.—Turretini Opera, vol. ii. p. 393.

|| See also South's Sermons, vol. ii. p. 503—508, on Acts ii. 24.

justly condemns this idea, horrible like most of the Calvinistic^c notions, maintaining :—

First, That our Saviour descended into hell, *i. e.* to the “invisible mansion of departed spirits,” not to the place of penal punishment, but to that region of the invisible mansion, “the other division of the same place, where the souls of the righteous rest in hope.”

And, secondly, That he preached to “the spirits in prison,” *i. e.* to the saints in confinement, “whose enlargement is the liberation predicted.”

The first position Horsley considers settled at once by the words of the thief on the cross—(and Newcome* and Barrow, I think, adopt the same inference)—“To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise ;” which, however, to me, does not seem so easily concluded ;—for, first, that the soul of the thief was to-day in Paradise, we may entertain no doubt, but the words do not import further—that our Saviour was in Paradise only, and no where else—that he visited the unseen regions, and only communed with those who, in one division, rested in the hope of coming happiness—and not with those who, in the other division of the same place, endured the expectation of coming misery. He merely tells the thief that he shall that day be with him in Paradise ; but he intimates nothing as to his going no where else, or his visiting the miserable.

Second, He preached to “the spirits in prison,”

* Vol. i. p. 231.

i. e. (according to Horsley) to the saints,—to those who, previously to their bodily death, “had been brought to repentance and faith in the Redeemer to come.” Now, on this I remark, that although the “spirits in prison” are certainly said to be those who were “sometime disobedient,” (and it is sufficiently clear that they must have offended,) it is not said that “they had been brought to repentance and faith,” which words of the learned Bishop really solve the difficulty by begging the question.—They were sometime disobedient, *i. e.* before death, and I see nothing, in the bare words of Peter, to force me to conclude that they were not in that region of the mansion which previous disobedience for sometime implies. Again, to what purpose could the preaching be to the souls of the righteous, who rest in hope? Their salvation was, it is to be presumed, as secure as we can suppose the spirits of the just to be, and their liberation of course equally so. It is true, “Justin Martyr and Origen have thought that the souls even of good men were, after death, under the power of the devil, who made them sometimes appear, at the charms and evocations of magicians. And Anastasius of Antioch strongly supports the sentiments of Origen, and maintains that the souls of the just were in the power of the devil and hell, before Jesus Christ descended thither, and delivered them thence by his power.”* In these opinions we cannot concur,

nor can we acquiesce in the interpretation of Horsley ; but we take the preaching to be, where it could be effectual, to those who, having died in their sins, were disobedient—were in prison, as it is said, for their offences—and were, during life, without the knowledge of a Redeemer, by whose means their liberation from prison could and would be ultimately secured, and by whose revelation their lives might have been different, had it been known to them previously to death. Neither can I apply the word “ prison ” to the “ region of repose and rest, where the souls of the righteous abide in joyful hope of the consummation of their bliss.” Nay, it is used for hell, as Newcome* observes, in his description of that region, called sometimes “ by the name of prison, sometimes utter darkness, sometimes death, hell, a lake burning with fire and brimstone, prepared for the devil and his angels.” In such cases it is inadmissible to refine or enlarge. A man is thrown into prison because he has offended ; and the plain interpretation of the word “ prison,” used by Peter (*τοις ἐν φυλακῇ* —), implies a place of confinement, from which the inmate or prisoner would gladly escape ; but I cannot conceive such a wish to animate the righteous, who abide in hope or joy. Happiness is comparative : it is granted that the consummation must be greater than the foretaste, but it is denied that beings who abide in joy

* Vol. i. p. 403.

can be subject to the achings and longings for change which we feel, or can experience any thing like the desire of escape which their confinement in prison would imply.

LETTER XIII.

“ I am sorry, then, I have pretended to be a Philosopher ;—for I find your questions very perplexing ; and am in danger, if my answer be too rigid and severe, of passing for a pedant and scholastic ; if it be too easy and free, of being taken for a preacher of vice and immorality.”

Hume.

“ O let him far be banished away,
And in his stead let love for ever dwell !
Sweete love, that doth his golden wings embay
In blessed nectar and pure pleasure’s well,
Untroubled of vile feare or bitter fell.”

Spenser.

I SHALL be reminded, however, of one thing certain, that the spirits in prison were the Antedeluvians, (a proof, by the way, of the immortality of the soul, seeing they still existed after the drowning of their bodies ;) and that, consequently, the drift of my argument infers,—first, that the gospel revelation and the knowledge of Christ crucified is not necessary to salvation,—or, in other words, that natural religion is sufficient.

And, secondly,—and by implication,—that the spirits of the disobedient, after their transference

to the nether mansion, may yet be saved ; that our state at death is not irreversibly fixed ; and that forgiveness may be obtained, and happiness secured, in the world to come.

It is true, Turretin, under a variety of references, assures us, “ *Religio salutaris nulla esse potest sine Christo et fide in ipsum.*”* And we have it in the Acts,† “ Neither is there salvation in any other (than Christ), for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” It is not necessary to consider this point with reference to the many individuals and nations, of the present day, who reject or deny the necessary efficacy of faith and belief in Christ,—the indispensable necessity of which can apply to those only subsequent to his revelation. The question with us is as to the Antedeluvians, who never heard of Christ ; and I have great pleasure in here referring to the learned and illustrious Apostle of the Gentiles : ‡—“ Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek : but glory, honour, and peace shall be to every man who worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek ; for with God there is no respect of persons.”§ Jew and Greek is a division that comprehends all mankind, and, as M^r Knight observes,§ “ by declaring that glory and peace shall come not only upon such Jews, but

* Oper. vol. i. p. 11. † Acts iv. 12. ‡ Rom. ii. 9, 10, 11.

§ Epistles, vol. i. p. 182, Note on Rom. i. 16.— See also p. 200.

upon such Greeks as have wrought good, St. Paul hath taught that salvation is not confined to them who have enjoyed revelation; that in all nations there are men who fear God and work righteousness; and that, at the judgment, such shall have the benefit of the method of salvation, established at the fall, and revealed in the gospel, extended to them, though it was not discovered to them during their life-time on earth." I am aware that the inference here given by M^r Knight has been attempted to be evaded, by restricting the word to a credence in particular doctrines, and by consequence inferring against the salvation of Heathens, who could neither have knowledge of, nor faith in Christ, as the Saviour of the world. To me it appears, in the language of St. Paul, that "whatever is not of faith is sin;"* that is, whatever results not from a conscientious endeavour to know and do the will of God, (the only just foundation of moral duty,) according to the measure of our understanding and means of information, is sinful—whatever is not from the gospel of the Christian, is to him who never heard of it, and whose creed it is not, certainly not sin; but whatever is not from faith—from the conscience—from a firm conviction of the integrity and rectitude of the purpose, under a sincere desire to please God, according to the ability and information (after due inquiry) of the individual, whether Jew, Christian, or Pagan, is clearly

* Rom. xiv. 23.

sin, and nothing else. “Every benevolent and useful man in society (says Dr. Doddridge*), I love and honour as such, whether he be or be not a Christian. Every one that admits the truth of the Mosaic and Christian revelation, and, loving and serving the great Author of our being, looks for salvation, pardon, and peace, through Jesus Christ, *practically* submitting to the laws he has established, I embrace as a brother, whatever party or denomination he may belong to, and however we may differ in our judgment concerning the *phrases* used in any catechism or creed that can come into question between us.”—“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” It is scarcely necessary to add, I hope, what it appears to me impossible seriously to deny, that the gospel cannot make a knowledge of Christ necessary to salvation, with those who never heard of the Saviour or of his revelation.^b

As to the second inference,—the reasoning here can only be pushed to apply to the spirits of the Antediluvians, who knew not Christ, nor had the advantage of his preaching;—and if the argument be good, that he descended into hell, properly so called, as Calvin and Beza maintain, and as we have endeavoured to shew, but without alleging that he endured the supposed pains of the reprobate, it necessarily follows that such descent must have been for some purpose or other. It is maintained, I am

* Corresp. and Diary, vol. iv. p. 319.

aware, that our Saviour's descent was a necessary part of the great scheme of redemption, "which* required that the Divine Word should take our nature upon him, and fulfil the entire condition of humanity, in every period and stage of man's existence, from the commencement of life in the mother's womb to the extinction and renovation of it." In short, that his detention in the sepulchre, and his descent into hell, in the above sense, exhibit the extremes of bodily inanition and mental agony which he was required to endure:† but this necessity, admitting it, required not that he should preach to the spirits in prison, an act which certainly inferred some purpose; and that purpose could only be for good to the spirits so confined—and that good could only be, so far as I can see, the proclaiming to them the glad tidings of the sacrifice he had made, and the reconciliation he had effected—and the means by which their sufferings must ultimately be relieved, and forgiveness obtained. "Thus saith the Lord,‡ even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered."—"They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness, and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder."c

With reference to the foregoing observations and

* Horsley, Serm. 1 vol. 8vo. p. 251.

† See Turret. Oper. vol. ii. p. 395.

‡ Isa. xlix. 25.—Ps. cvii. 10 to 16.

inferences, which we think material to our purpose, the reader may now be reminded of the impassable “great gulph fixed,” in the case of Lazarus and the rich man, which has been propounded as an insuperable difficulty in the road we are clearing. Yet, whatever be the full interpretation of this striking parable,* one thing is evident—that the rich man was not incorrigible, and that he repented; nor can it affect the fact that Christ is Lord both of “the quick and the dead,”†—of “the dead and living”—whom he will judge according to their works. For he has the “keys of hell and death;”‡ and he certainly passed the “great gulph;” for, as we have seen, under whatever interpretation we adopt, he descended into hell, properly so called, and preached to the spirits in prison,§ and he ascended into heaven, that he “might fill all things,”||—“all things in the world, within the whole compass of heaven and earth,” as the passage is explained by Dr. South. ¶

Before leaving our present ground, it is material to observe here, as bearing strongly on our future observations,—the contrition and repentance of the rich man, indicating the change which had already commenced, and the repentance which was already operating, for the deeds done in the body.

* Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. h, p. 195.

† Acts x. 41.—2 Tim. iv. 1.—Rom. xiv. 9.

‡ Rev. i. 18.

§ 1 Pet. iii. 19.

|| Ephes. iv. 10.

¶ Sermon on Ephes. iv. 10.

LETTER XIV.

“ In this immense duration, his life will be an uninterrupted progress of virtue, honour, and enjoyment.”

Dwight.

“ And some, not here called forth, may slumber on,
Till this vain pageant of a world is gone ;
Lying too deep for things that perish here,
Waiting for life,—but in a nobler sphere.”

Rogers.

MR. TUCKER*^a has suggested reasons for thinking, that opportunities may be afforded in the next life to those who may have been denied them here ; but that this cannot extend to those to whom the offers of revelation have been fairly propounded ; and it would not necessarily follow, from what has been said in the preceding letter, that the disobedient (departed since Christ's revelation was placed within their reach) should have the benefit of a proceeding similar to that to which we have adverted,—if, in this life, they have wilfully refused to hear him. Neither does the reasoning conclude

* Light of Nature, vol. vi. p. 442 ; vol. v. p. 634.

that our state at death is, or is not, irreversibly fixed—admits not of any improvement in the intermediate portion of time between death and the general judgment. The inference, either way, will naturally evolve itself, as we proceed, and we wish to impose no restraint on the tendency of our reasoning, or on the judgment of the reader ; for to us it appears, that the opinions of divines on this subject are extremely confused. That the intermediate state is not a state of sleep is generally admitted. “ It is a joyful state of hope to the righteous,—a sorrowful state of miserable expectation to the wicked,”—say, in substance, the generality of divines ; who inform us, at the same time, that “ the* Scripture acknowledges only two times for the remission of sins,—one of the penitent sinner here on earth,† and the other at the day of judgment, when sentence of absolution shall be passed upon the imperfections of the faithful servants of Christ.” ‡ “ There is no repenting (says Dr. South§) when we are nailed up in our coffins ; no believing in the grave ; no doing the works of charity and temperance in the dust ; or growing new creatures among the worms. Life is the adequate space allotted by the wisdom of heaven for these matters, which being ended, there is no after-

* Trollope's An. Theol. vol. i. p. 160. † Matt. ix. 6.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 18.

§ Vol. v. p. 46—49, on John ix. iv.—See also Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Subjects, p. 99.

game, or retrieving of a bad choice." With the grave, properly so called—with the filth of the charnel-house—we have nothing to do; but as there is an after-game, and as we, that is, ourselves, are not nailed up in our coffins, it is to this *we*, and to this *after-game*, the question applies; and we must not allow any evasion of the question to satisfy our queries. Now we must observe, that any thing like hope or expectation is to us incomprehensible, unless in conjunction with the necessary influence of its effects. The expectation of misery must, we conceive, (as exhibited in the case of the rich man,) necessarily produce repentance and amendment, and the suffering induced before the great day must certainly abate so much of the suffering to be then imposed.* Dr. Priestly† indeed maintained, that the state of death is one of "absolute insensibility, being opposed to life." "If there be (says he) any intermediate state, in which the soul alone exists, conscious of any thing, there is an absolute silence concerning it in the Scriptures; death being always spoken of there as a state of rest, of silence, and of darkness—a place where the wicked cease from troubling, but where the righteous cannot praise God." God forbid that we could acquiesce in this comfortless doctrine, or that we could discover for it satisfactory grounds in Scripture, far less in rea-

* See Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Subjects, p. 100, et seq.

† Cor. of Chr7. vol. i. p. 377—379.

son. Will the reader bear with me while I venture to examine this point?

First, then, I remark,* that the doctrine of the soul's immortality, as maintained by the ablest Natural Theologists, necessarily contradicts the assumption of a state of sleep after death—a cessation, in truth, of existence, which sleep, in our disembodied state, must imply. There is no parallel between the phenomenon of sleep in our present state and the supposed sleep when we are disencumbered from the body. The sleep of this life is the natural effect of the exhaustion of the body, or of the compound man, and is the kind restorer which our Maker has provided for the restoration of our imperfect powers; and death is compared to sleep merely in an analogical sense, because it is the termination of the tug and tempest of this existence. But if sleep, that is, insensibility—temporary death, in short—does necessarily overtake the soul, in its unimpeded state, it cannot be possessed of that natural (I do not say necessary) immortality, which cannot die, excepting through the withdrawing of the divine grace, or the immediate act of God. Properly speaking, to talk of the sleep, that is, temporary death, of an immortal and immaterial substance, of spiritual energy, is just as intelligible as to speak of dead life, the dead living, or the living dead.^b It is unnecessary here to recapitulate the

* See Bishop Bull's two Sermons on the State of the Soul on its Separation from the Body.

opinion of the ancient Theists, (already given in a former volume, to which I beg leave to refer,*) all substantially contradictory of this revolting doctrine. "Moses tells us (says Warburton†) that God, long after the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, called himself their God; but God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; therefore, the souls of those patriarchs are yet existing in a separate state;" (and he subjoins in a note,)—"which unanswerably confutes that semi-pagan dream of the soul's sleeping till the resurrection of the body—they who hold the soul to be only a quality, and yet talk of its sleep between death and the resurrection, use a jargon which confounds all languages as well as reason."

Second.—Nor is revelation less explicit upon this point. "O thou God (prayed the martyr Polycarp, when brought to the stake) of the whole race of righteous men, who live before thee, among these may I be received before *thee this day*."‡ For my own part, I cannot but hold the words of our Saviour to the thief on the cross,§ c —the parable of Lazarus,—and particularly the words of St. Paul, "whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; but "we are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord:"§—I cannot, I say, but hold these as con-

* Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. p. 18, 19, with references.

† Div. Leg. vol. iv. p. 345.

‡ See Stackhouse's Body of Divinity, p. 781; and Cave, Life of Polycarp, sec. 13.

§ 2 Cor. v. 6, 8.

clusive proofs from Scripture, (and it is agreeable to right reason, and the opinion of the ablest Philosophers,) that, on the departure of the soul from the body, we shall be admitted to the knowledge of the truth and the presence of Jehovah;* for the dust must return to the dust, “to the earth as it was,” but the spirit shall return to God who gave it.†

We are farther told, particularly of the passages we have been considering, in this and some preceding letters, “that‡ whatever took place in the human nature of Christ, may be considered as a model and example of what must take place, in a certain due proportion and degree, in every man united to him.” “Christ’s disembodied soul descended into hell, (that is, the happy part of the mansion of the dead, according to Horsley, whom we now quote;) thither, therefore, shall the soul of every believer in Christ descend. In that place the soul of Christ, in its separate state, possessed and exercised active powers: in the same place, therefore, shall the believer’s soul possess and exercise activity.” Now, the exercise of active powers, without the influence of motives, which are the springs of action, is, I apprehend, utterly inconceivable; and, if we admit, as we must, the influence of motives, matured into activity—this, again, as necessarily infers accountability for their exercise. Thus have we motives matured into ac-

* See Tillotson, Ser. xxiv. vol. i. p. 218.

† Eccles. xii. 7; and see Good’s *Lucretius*, note 1010, B. 2.

‡ Horsley, p. 263.

tion, and, consequently, accountability ascribed to the soul after death ; and if so, *its state at death cannot be irreversibly fixed*,—a conclusion which I think necessarily follows, from the admission even of Horsley here noticed, although he expresses himself otherwise in another place.^d But, further, I observe, we are told in Scripture of the rebel angels “ which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation.”* We read, too, of angels and archangels, of cherubim and seraphim, of thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, clearly implying gradation and subordination.

Of Lucifer it is written,—“ Son of the morning ! how art thou cut down to the ground.—For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.—I will be like the Most High.—Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell.”† We are, moreover, told, that “ there is none good but God ;” and we must conclude hence, that even the holy angels (an expression to be understood in a comparative sense, as we have “ the holy men of God,‡” implying, at any rate, not equivalent holiness) have not reached that point of singleness from which deviation is impossible, but are in progress, and in so far imperfect. So we are told “ Christ tasted death for all,”—(ὕπερ πάντων, as it stands in the original.) Angels, we must conclude, as well as men, and all without exception, must have the benefit of the sacrifice.

* Jude, 6.

† Is. xiv. 12.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 21.

Indeed this verse of St. Paul* is considered to have been, in ancient manuscripts, much broader and stronger than we now have it in our translations; for, so far back as the time of Origen, I believe, most copies had it (*χωρὶς θεου*) excepting God, not (*χαρὶς θεου*) by the grace of God, as we now have it—so that, if we read, he tasted death for all excepting (not by the grace of) God, the sense becomes still more determinate as to the universality of his sacrifice. But, waving this argument, the sense imports much the same in either way,—more especially if we consider that the death was endured *ὑπὲρ πάντων*—“for all,”†—that is, we may presume, in the same sense as the same expressions are ascribed to God, as (*πατὴρ πάντων*‡) “the Father of all,” angels and men. It is at any rate established, by the fact of the fall of the angels, that they did exist in a state of probation: and I do not see why, in the case of man, the link “a little lower than the angels,” § death should not translate him into a progressive state; and, if progressive, then must he be exposed to motives inferring activity and accountability—his happiness in the end resulting from the perfectibility of his rational nature—determining him in all cases to the choice of good, and fitting him for the enjoyment of the presence of that Being who is goodness, in its unalloyed essence.

Perfectibility, applied to any created being, must, of course, be understood comparatively, with re-

* Heb. ii. 9. † 2 Cor. v. 15. ‡ Eph. iv. 6. § Ps. viii. 5.

ference to the original and originating cause, which is perfection,—but a perfectibility which enables a rational creature to discover the truth, will also determine him to what is right. Right conduct, where all the causes of delinquency are removed, must as necessarily follow right knowledge, as motion the exercise of the motive power, where this is unimpeded; for right action is only visible truth, and truth is happiness, our being's aim and end. If we are to enter the kingdom of heaven “as a little child,”^e does it not seem to imply, that we are *there* afterwards to attain manhood? that, “like as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, (in the language of the learned Apostle,) even so we also should walk in newness of life. Christ being raised from the dead,—death hath no more dominion over him. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God:”^{*}—implying that, like Christ's, our resurrection shall be to perpetuity of life—of holiness and exemption from sin—to sinless and enduring perfectibility. If we deny the possibility of this perfectibility, (resulting from considering angels and the spirits of men, after death, as moral agents, as rational beings, directed in their choice by the influence of motives, and consequently exposed, like all created substances, to fall, until they have reached that condition which discovers to them the truth, and

^{*} See Rom. vi.

thus determines them to the pursuit of virtue and holiness,) the alternative is, to withdraw from our spirits, in a future life, the freedom of will—to convert the liberty of choice into the absolute necessity of obedience, and to rest their and our happiness on the continued sustaining power and gracious promises of God;—promises, I admit, of the most unspeakable satisfaction, but which are in no way endangered by making the period of their fulfilment dependent on the growing capacity of the being to enjoy them. To me it appears, in reference to the moral completion of intellectual beings, that the supposed alternative is in truth to deprive them of the greatest achievement and the highest privilege, the very essence of their rational nature. I am disposed to believe that the soul, amid the vast variety of untried being which spreads out before us, must be purified in its capacity by continued actions of obedience, and refined in its immortality by sustained habits of virtue, progressive, from grade to grade, and from world to world, through whatever new scenes and changes we may pass, after our escape from the body, until we reach that perfectibility which enables us to breathe, unimpeded by any aberration, the atmosphere of holiness.^f Perfect in knowledge and goodness, the soul may then, and not till then, know the Godhead:

“ When not a cloud of fear or doubt,
A vapour from this world of tears,
Between her and her God appears.”^g

Then shall his promises be fulfilled, when our intel-

lectual being has become a fit recipient of them,—when all the causes of delinquency are removed, and the beauty of holiness is intimately and immediately seen, and of necessity felt, as the controlling and uncontrollable influence and motive ; yet determining, not by any other necessity of choice than the preference which must result from the power of virtue, changing the information of the imperfect understanding into the redeeming energy of the sinless will. Sin and virtue are antagonists to the core, and, in a state of existence, such as that of spirits made perfect, a dark spot, a failing, an aberration, is just as impossible as opacity in a flood of uniform light. I am aware that the existence of angels has been denied ;^h “ those bright creatures named spirits of knowledge,” who are represented in Scripture as employed in praising and serving their God—“ praising God, and saying,—Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men ;” for “ there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

“ God (says Bishop Atterbury) is pleased to use the ministry of angels, a rank of beings who are *freed from all incumbrance of matter*,ⁱ and by that means more ready and more able to perform that office allotted them by God, of being ministering spirits, and executing God’s commands. That there are such beings is evident, not only from divine revelation, but from natural reason ; because all histories furnish us with instances of such effects wrought by some invisible beings as surpass the

power of any man to perform." Be this as it may, I shall not stop at the eleventh hour, in this already overgrown letter, to provoke discussion, for

"There seems around me some dark chain,
Which still, as I essay to soar,
Baffles, alas! each wild endeavour;" yet
In hopes of glory to be quite involved.

* * * * *

"From our decays a pleasure to receive,
And kindle into transport at a grave—
What equals this?"

Under, then, the impressions of this letter, let us return for a moment to the parable of the rich man. Not only did he repent of the things done in the body—not only did this repentance produce change, and a cry for mercy—but he begs that a message may be sent to his surviving brothers, in order to their conversion. Abraham tells him,—“Now Lazarus is comforted,” but “thou art tormented.” It is true we are considering a parable,—yet a parable is not without meaning;* and the scope of the one now before us is evidently to shew the destination of the souls of the good and the bad after death. The incipient stage of happiness is sufficiently declared, that poor Lazarus, for the integrity of his life, under the miseries he had endured in the body, is comforted; but the rich man, for the opportunities he had neglected, or the things he had done in the body, is tormented. And the suffering we see producing the natural and necessary effects—change

* See Porteus' Lectures, Lect. xi.

and repentance. Now, it is impossible to conceive how these natural effects of change and repentance can be stationary—can be at once arrested in their salutary progress, and converted into fixedness and impenitence—into irreversible punishment, and incorrigible wickedness. Nay, the very words of our Saviour, on another occasion, rebut such a conclusion, and anticipate gradation in guilt, and discrimination in award—abrogating the doctrine of ranging the whole human race into two distinct classes, the elect and the reprobate, the saved and the damned. In the regions of futurity, “there are many mansions.”—“For one star differeth from another in glory;” and the servant who knew not his master’s will, yet “did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; but he who knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”* Inequalities in virtue and in intellectual improvement here, infer inequalities in enjoyments and gradation in advancement hereafter, until the general character is reformed, and prepared for eventual and universal happiness. Inequalities in wickedness, in the same way, imply inequalities in remedial suffering, until the delinquency is removed, and the besetting tendency redeemed; but, if these proportionate inflictions (and proportion is the very essence of justice) are to be considered as the fixed and ultimate con-

* See Luke xii. 47.—Note f, p. 61.

dition, we must have hereafter as many mansions of everlasting misery, not only as we now have shades of temporal crime here, but as we have had since man was. The same proportionate distribution of rewards is set forth in the parables of the pounds* and of the talents,†—particularly in the former, where the greater improvement of the same sum is rewarded by a higher acknowledgment. It may be argued, that the division which our Lord makes (in Matt. xxv.) is perhaps at variance with these inferences ; but, looking to what we have previously said,‡ we would observe, that here, as in every other case, the discrepancies are to be reconciled by the dictates of common sense, (at whose tribunal the reasonableness of every obligatory injunction, and of every penal sentence, must irresistibly be discussed ;) and, independently of these parables, it is impossible to conclude that the different shades of temporal guilt shall be visited by the same measure of punishment,—or that the eternity adverted to, does not represent that period of time necessary to expiate the guilt of the individual, or rather to purify the creature from those moral stains which must be removed, and to effect that change and bent of disposition which must be produced, before the soul can stem the current of its pollutions, and begin its advancement in the boundless way, and in the vast expanse, of the spiritual and divine life.

* Matt. xxv. 14.

† Luke xix. 12.

‡ See Let. ix.

LETTER XV.

"You are dead to the world, and can no longer live to it; your life is spiritual and heavenly; as is your life, such must be the actions which flow from it, the inclinations that attend it."

Sherlock.

"I'm weary, I'm weary—this cold world of ours—
I will go dwell afar with fairies and flowers.

* * * * *

I'm weary, I'm weary—I'm off with the wind :
Can I find a worse fate than the one left behind ?
Fair beings of moonlight, gay dwellers in air,
O shew me your kingdom! O let me dwell there!"

L. E. L.

BUT what comes, then, of the resurrection of the body,^a if, immediately after death, we are, in our further progress, to be translated (as we think) into the presence of the Deity? And here I cannot help alluding to what Horsley has said on this subject, whose words imply our re-union hereafter, if not to the same identical bodies, at least to corporal frames, capable of bodily sensation, and of external impressions, through the medium of

material organs. “ Thus the end (says he*) for which all are destined to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ is declared by the Apostle to be this,—that every individual may be rewarded with corporal enjoyment, or punished with corporal pain,” according as his behaviour may require. We are told, that without holiness no man shall see God; and if I can form any idea of this divine perfection, it implies in its very nature an estrangement and exemption from all corporeal desires, appetites, passions, and enjoyments. If the case be as represented by Bishop Horsley, most assuredly it is opposed to all our notions of spiritual existence, and if hereafter we are to be rewarded by “ corporal enjoyments,” or punished by “ corporal pains,” I see not why flesh and blood may not inherit the kingdom of heaven. St. Paul expressly tells us they cannot, “ neither can corruption inherit incorruption.”^b Nor can I gather from his words the inference so explicitly given by Horsley. We must, according to the Apostle, appear at the judgment-seat, to receive the things “*done*” in the body, (*not* things “ in the body ;†”) that is, the things done by the act of the soul in the body, in this preparatory stage,—implying, by the way, that things may be done out of the body,—or, in other words, the existence of

* See Sermons, 8vo. p. 484, and p. 526.

† See Tillotson, vol. iii. p. 151.—2 Cor. v. 10.—Macknight.—

Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Subjects, p. 244.

the soul separate from the body. But, as to the mode in which, in our then state, be it what it may, we shall be operated upon by the sentence of Almighty God, the Apostle is silent. Nay, we have already seen him affirming that good men are present with the Lord so soon as they are absent from the body, and he expressly assures us, that that “which is sown a natural body shall be raised a spiritual body,”* (*i. e.* a spiritual substance, *σῶμα πνευματικόν*.) “There is (continues the Apostle) a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterwards that which is spiritual.”^c Now, if the inspired writer assures me, that he desires to be absent from the body, that he may be present with the Lord; for that, while he is present in the body, he is absent from the Lord;—what am I to conclude, but that, immediately after death, he would pass into the presence of the Deity? And if I am told, that that which is sown a natural substance, shall be raised a spiritual substance—that the natural is first, and afterwards the spiritual—am I to infer, that after having passed into the presence of God in a disembodied state, man is to assume, at the resurrection, a spiritual substance; and in that spiritual substance to be subject to the operation of external bodily impressions, to be acted upon by “corporal enjoyment,” or punished by “corporal pain?”^d We know

* 1 Cor. xv. from verse 35.

not what a spirit is, but we know what it is not, for our Saviour defines it—"A spirit*^e hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Christ was not visible to Paul at his conversion; nor can man see God, who is a spirit, and live. A spirit, then, is clearly not matter, or palpable to material organs, so far as we know; and if it be not matter, not flesh or bone, and yet possess sensation, and be acted upon by external bodily impressions, and obnoxious to corporal enjoyment or pain, what are we to understand by it?

The subject we now consider is one of revelation exclusively, and from that alone, guided by rational interpretation, can we gather any information; and I know of only a few passages which have been considered communicative on this point. We are told that here are required "meats for the belly, and the belly for meats; but God shall destroy both it and them:"† for, in the next world, "they neither marry, nor are given in marriage;"‡ clearly implying, that all our bodily organs of nutrition, and of our most exquisite appetites and passions, shall never be resumed. For§ Christ "shall change our vile body—(it is not said that the soul shall be changed, implying that the body is the cause of all our evils^f)—that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body," or substance. "Then|| shall the righteous (says our Saviour himself) shine forth as

* Luke xxiv. 39. † 1 Cor. vi. 13. ‡ Luke xx. 35, 36.

§ Phil. iii. 21. || Matt. xiii. 43.

the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Here we are positively and unequivocally assured, that our vile bodies shall be changed and fashioned like unto the glorious body in which Christ now lives ;—it shall shine forth as the sun. Christ, at his transfiguration, and before his resurrection, could change his bodily appearance, so that " his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light ;"* and after his resurrection he put on various forms—exhibited the wounded side of the natural man (not certainly of the Divinity), in proof of it, and of his identity—and assumed the palpable and impalpable.† But it is not with the body of Christ, *before* he ascended to the Father, that the simile and change are connected. We are to be changed, like unto the glorious body or spiritual substance of Christ, as he sitteth at the right hand (metaphorically speaking), and in the presence of the Father of Spirits, (with whom, too, we shall hold intercourse in our *spirits*,) whom *no man* hath seen, nor can see, and who dwelleth, we are told, in light inaccessible to mortal eye, and full of unapproachable glory. When Christ appeared to Paul, we are informed that " the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man ;" and Paul himself, although he " heard a voice, saw no man ;" yet " there shined around him a light from heaven."‡ Now, any change more entire and complete it is

* Matt. xvii. 2. † See Mark xvi.—Luke xxiv.—John xx. xxi.

‡ See Acts ix. ; xxii. 6 ; xxvi. 13.

impossible to conceive, and accordingly, we are told, it shall be effected by the working of that power competent to subdue all things.* It is raised incorruptible—in glory (the glory of the celestial, not of the terrestrial)—in power—a spiritual body or substance. Now, if we will have it, that after this change, still we have the same tabernacle that contained the soul in its earthly pilgrimage, and became a loathsome carcase when the soul left it, I can only understand this in the sense that the omnipotency of God may enable him, without the creation of any new matter, to fashion our glorified bodies, out of the inert mass of his previous creation, and to give to them, on re-union with the immortal spirit, those spiritual frames (if I may so express it)—those (*σώματα λεπτά*†) which shall be independent of organic structure—require neither blood, nor flesh, nor bones—be insensible to the gratification of any, and the most exquisite animal appetites of our present state, which shall never die, but which shall be as enduring as the immortal spirit they overshadow or enshrine. It is, I think, mentioned by Mr. Locke, as an absurd inquiry to attempt to ascertain what sort of bodies we shall have at the resurrection; but it does not seem equally absurd to endeavour to assure ourselves thus far (which Scripture carries us), were it only to enable us to divest ourselves of the weakness and folly of any regard to our dead body, other than opinion and decency dictate; for,

* See Phil. iii. 21.

† See Burnett's Arch. p. 410.

most assuredly it shall never be resumed in its present state ; and we may understand the change which we are assured it must undergo, so far, at least, as to be perfectly satisfied (even if we will entangle the inquiry by contending for the same identical body *g*) that the change must be so thorough and entire as to be, to all the intents and purposes of a spiritual being, a different body, adapted to a different state, to different capacities and powers.*

And it is gratifying to find, that this disregard of the present body, after it has served its temporary purpose of materiality on this earth, and has really become (however difficult it may be, from the association of ideas, to assent to the position, and I have felt and grant the difficulty) of no more importance than any other dead mass of matter, and equally insensible as the food we every day see without any emotion on our tables. It is gratifying, I say, to find that this disregard of the body, and the belief of a spiritual independent existence, in some shape or other, immediately after death, is not more the doctrine of revealed than of natural religion. Socrates gives us St. Paul's doctrine of an immediate passage into the presence of the Deity ; for he tells Crito, when he applied to him on the subject of his funeral, that, as he should, after he had swallowed the poison, (or rather after it had taken effect,) " no longer remain with them, but pass to the region of the blessed," he might use the

* See Burnett, Arch. p. 417.

dead body as he pleased, and might deem best ; it could be of no consequence to him, Socrates, who would then have escaped.^h

“ When coldness wraps this suffering clay,
Ah, whither strays the immortal mind ?

“ * * * * *

Away, away, without a wing,
O'er ail, through all, its thought shall fly,—
A nameless and eternal thing,
Forgetting what it was to die.”

Yet it is clear from Scripture, that, at the resurrection, we shall be re-united to some sort of glorified substance, and that the happiness of the good shall then be more complete than in the intermediate state of being, since death called them away from this shadowy world of change, the fashion of which so soon passeth away.ⁱ This is indeed the immortality which the gospel of Christ brought to light—the immortality of a glorified and incorruptible substance, encompassing the immortal spirit in some way inconceivable to us, and without any of those gross and material inherencies which degrade our present bodies, and render them what they are, the sepulchres of the soul here—ever tending to corruption—the prey of disease—and ultimately dissolving in loathsomeness and death. “ They shall mount (says Isaiah) with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint.”* This, I say, is the immortality which the gospel of

* Is. xl. 31.

Christ brought to light ;—for the immortality of the soul is a doctrine of natural religion, and was known and taught before Christ appeared.* The celebrated Dr. Warburton, we have seen, denies this, whether in the Heathen or Mosaic systems ; but his labours are now (I believe universally) considered as affording only an ingenious instance of paradox, and a splendid example of perverted erudition.^k

And while we endeavour to explore the mysteries of Scripture, may we not hope to discover, at the same time, however obscurely, something of the nature of the ulterior region to which they point—something of the immortal scenery, which, even in the remote distance, and by the dim light of our present imperfect faculties, we may yet see breaking like a sun-beam through the clouds and darkness of humanity. The sea and the earth, we are told, shall give up their dead,—

“ When, rapt in fire, the realms of ether glow,

And heaven’s last thunder shakes the world below.”—

But it is impossible that the same bodies of infirmity shall be restored, since we shall, divested of our present structure of flesh and blood, of organs of nutrition, and of our most sensible appetites, be like the angels, and assume the glorified image of Christ. No man can see God and live—no man, *i. e.* the compound of flesh and blood and spirit. God is a Spirit ; he must be spiritually discerned ; and, in a disembodied state, we shall see him “ face

* Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Subjects, p. 17, et seq.

to face.”—“ We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is ;”* that is, when this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, “ dust has returned to dust, and the spirit to him who gave it ;”—words which, beyond all controversy, imply our existence in a spiritual state, apart from our present bodies, with the Father of Spirits.¹

The truth is, we cannot conceive a spiritual substance divested of corporal organization, because all our knowledge in this matter, independently of what Scripture affords, is drawn from experience of such a compound as man in this state.^m We cannot image a sentient, or rather an intellectual creature, hearing without ears, or seeing without eyes, or feeling without fingers, because our actions here are impressed by the operations of the substance of a material world, with which we are, while in it, indissolubly connected. But let us transfer ourselves to the spiritual world—to the presence of the Father of Spirits—and then we may cease to wonder, although we see not the way of it, how the immortal energy of mind may operate without the intervention of material organization,—and how the individuality of the spirit may be visible and cognizable to the intuitive perceptivity of pure intelligence, which, in truth, here even constitutes our real identity, and in which identity, certainly, be the shape what it may, we must inevitably hereafter receive our award for the things done in the body.

• 1 John iii. 2.

Now, if we turn from the glorified identity of the blessed, to the raised body of the damned,—what a picture have we before us, under the doctrine we are combating? The polluted dust consolidated—the loathsome rind quickened—and the sad and ghastly flesh of our earthly humanity torn from its rotting slumber, and borne from the vile consumers of its corruption. Yea, an immortal spirit summoned from the wretched expectation of the reprobate, and driven to the terrible reality in the shambles of the damned. Clothed in a frame identical of its former perishing corporeity, yet capable of sustaining the weight of eternal infliction—of enduring the tortures of unutterable woe—of supporting the torments of everlasting flames. Still further, if we keep in view the reflections which this letter suggests, of the opposite nature and tendencies of corporal and immaterial agencies, more monstrous will the position appear which would have us acknowledge the eternal operation of palpable perishing matter on the subtilty of spiritual being—the action of an embodied flame on the energy of a disembodied spirit. It is not marvellous, perhaps, that the mind which can get over the physical impossibilities, and the striking incongruities these images present in the nature of things, or the moral contradiction they give to the employment, and character, and attributes, and plan of a merciful Deity,—should be able to distance all reasonable considerations, and bolt, in utter

confusion of ideas, through every opposing barrier, to this revolting conclusion;—but passing marvellous it certainly is, that any man of common apprehension, having once reached the inference, should yet be able to enjoy one moment's respite from the incessant beckoning of the maddening apparition, or be able to find in the wild range of his dismal hopes one resting-place for one holy aspiration.

No wonder that the controversy of such doctrinal misery should be that of gall and wormwood—that its bitterness should inveterate the very thought, and word, and deed of its true disciples. And, if the flames of persecution blazed on the altars of a virtuous Trajan—if the philosophy of Antoninus, and the glory of Aurelian, yet gave way to this detestable atrocity—no wonder is it, that the contemplation of such perilous horror should, in later times, have prepared even the priests of a better faith, and the “nursing fathers” of a happier dispensation, to outdo the cruel intolerance of the Heathen. No wonder that the melancholy madness of such frightful imaginings, being without the healing inspiration of true religion, is at once the most horrible and the most humbling of all mental aberration. No wonder that the mind, intensely considering such a doom, and *intensely believing it too*, should feel its faculties give way, its reason crushed into fatuity, and its energies scared into raving.ⁿ

LETTER XVI.

“ He that dies in an earnest pursuit is like one that is wounded in hot blood, who for a time scarce feels the hurt ; and, therefore, a mind fixed and bent upon somewhat that is *good*, doth best avert the dolours of death.”

Bacon.

“ Eternity will not efface
Those records dear of transports past
Thy image at our last embrace.”

Burns.

AND this leads me to the remarkable language of St. Paul, implying our knowledge of each other in a future state :—“ Whom we preach, (says that great Apostle,) warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom ; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”* Cicero could look forward to that day with joy, when he should join the assembly of departed spirits. Aristotle, we have seen, goes so far as to say that the dead are even affected by the fortunes of the living ; and Plato thought that they had a perception of what is passing on earth ;^a all implying our individuality and knowledge of each other after death.

* Col. i. 28. ; 2 Cor. iv. 14.

St. Paul's prayer is, that he may be able to present every man perfect,—indubitably inferring the same individuality and knowledge of those whom he had known in this life, and again recognised in their new and spiritual state. And the personality here implied is corroborated by the whole tenour of Scripture. Christ is termed the “Author and Finisher of our Faith.”—“We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, (implying personality and individuality;) for we shall see him as he is; and every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”* We expect hereafter the happiness of seeing God, of seeing him as he is, knowing as we are known, and seeing face to face. Of a perception, therefore, of God's immediate presence—of his individuality—of the *cause*, not of the effect,—our presently imperfect faculties will be rendered capable in a future life. Indeed the whole narrative is, in fact, continued personality—a history of the “man Christ Jesus,” whom we are to resemble hereafter; and the meliorating probation of this life seems tending to prepare us for the interchange of the benevolent affections. Nay, we know of no instance where the strength of affection and the power of friendship are more strongly evinced, and more beautifully displayed, than in the death of our Saviour. Jesus wept over the grave of his “friend Lazarus;” and when about to expire on the cross, he recommended his mother to the

* 1 John iii.

care of the disciple "whom he loved." It is impossible to read the affecting detail of this closing scene in the deep tragedy of his sufferings and death, as given in the simple language of the Evangelist,* without emotion:—"There stood (it is written) by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith to his mother, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home," "which he had near Mount Zion, after he had sold his inheritance in Galilee to the High Priest, where he always paid her the respect due to a parent."^b

I think it is Lord Shaftesbury and Soame Jenyns who argue that the generalities of Scripture—the universal benevolence recommended—preclude the exercise of friendship, or rather tacitly destroy it, independently of the fact that nowhere is it enjoined in the gospel. And here we may again observe Scripture speaking to our reason, addressing us by generalities, yet exhibiting a specific and practical instance for our example, leaving us to draw and apply the inference to any particular occasion. The broad principle of Christianity on this point, as laid down by our Saviour, is to love one another—to love our neighbours as ourselves—whatever things, in short, we could reasonably wish to receive from

* John xix. 26.

others, the same ought we to do to them. But we must remember, at the same time, that our Saviour did not abrogate the original and moral law of our nature—that which knit the hearts of Damon and Pythias, before his gospel was heard of; and the general injunctions of universal charity and goodwill are to be controlled in so far by the dictates of this original law, as evidenced in the striking instance afforded at the close of his life. It might, at first sight, unquestionably be argued, that these universal obligations, being apparently incompatible with the more concentrated nature of private friendship, so amiable and so beneficial in influence, so productive of human happiness, could not be claimed for Christianity; but the instance of our Saviour, who went about doing good *to all*, and who died *for all*, yet had a friend to whom, in the moment of dissolution, he recommended the dearest object of his affections, is in point to prove the contrary; and seems decisive in shewing, by his example on earth, which he left for our imitation, that in the assembly of the spirits of men made perfect hereafter, and like to him in heaven, this sublime disposition (which otherwise he had not recommended in his practice on earth) shall be fully developed. Believing, as we do, that Almighty God is a Being of infinite goodness and uncontrollable mercy, we hold it to be unanswerable, that in no one stage of our progress here or hereafter, will any enjoyment be withheld that can be safely conceded or granted to augment our permanent happiness; and consider-

ing it equally certain that the *tendencies* of things observable now, and the character forming in us by the discipline of this life will be completed in the next, necessarily without prejudice to the identity and individuality of the creature, we find it impossible to separate this identity and individuality, which thus remain distinct as to ourselves, from the knowledge of a similar individuality, as it must exist in others. Since the affectionate remembrance of the dead continues with us in this life after the object is removed, we conclude that the friendships and attachments begun here are only suspended to be fully developed in a future state of being. Since we pass into futurity with the ever-aching memory of the dead whom we have loved warm upon us, can we imagine that this emotion is suffered to outlive its object here merely to delude us hereafter ; or that, when by the dissolution of this corporal frame, we are prepared to grasp the reality, we are *then*, and not till then, to discover the mockery and illusion—to find that, although existing like ourselves, as we and the departed must do, in their and our proper identity, still the power of perception and the memory of that identity is destroyed? Living in the strength of our spiritual and individuating energy, can we be utterly unknown to each other, and utterly devoid of all sympathetic and intellectual communion? If the soul exists as an accountable entity hereafter, we cannot entertain this inference, or suppose, we conceive, that a benevolent Deity could suffer an

affection to be continued after the object of it is removed, to no purpose, save to impose on us in this life the cruel memory of separation, and the pains of unceasing regrets.

“ It must be so : ’tis not for self
That we so tremble on the brink ;
And striving to o’erleap the gulph,
Yet cling to being’s severing link.

Oh ! in that future let us think
To hold each heart, the heart that shares,
With them the immortal waters drink,
And soul in soul grow deathless theirs.” c

It is here, as it is beautifully said by Blair,* we begin to “prepare ourselves for those happy regions, where *charity never faileth*;—where, in the presence of the God of love, eternal and invariable friendships unite together all the blessed;—friendships, which, by no human infirmity disturbed, by death never separated, shall continue throughout endless ages, a great and distinguished portion of the celestial felicity.” The warm language of our Saviour used in comforting his disciples seems as it were intentionally decisive on this point:—“ He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me ; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will *manifest myself to him* ;”†—that is, to him, the identical person who hath kept my commandments. Nay, we are told, that when Jesus was asked by the young man, what he should do to inherit eternal life, Jesus, it is written, “ be-

* Ser. vol. iv. p. 377.

† John xiv. 21.

holding him, loved him.”* “Thy dead men (says Isaiah†) shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

Most of the ancient Fathers supposed the angels to have bodies; and, like Zeno, Tertullian seems to go so far as to ascribe a body even to God;^d while Pythagoras, again, if I remember well, forbade his scholars to engrave any image of the Supreme. We are, in truth, only children of a larger growth. And I once heard a child of five years put this singular interrogatory:—How can God see us, if he has no eyes—or hear us, if he has no ears—or touch us, if he has no hands? Nay, the celebrated John Locke (a name of which humanity may be proud) recognizes the possibility of superadding thought to matter,^e which, to me, implies the most outrageous contradiction.‡ That all things are possible to the Deity, not implying contradiction, is true; but that inert matter (solidity) can, without the immediate and constant agency of some vital perceptivity, become of itself perceptive, is, as I understand it, pure contradiction. Matter, the most sceptical will grant, is clearly not spirit, which is essentially perceptive; and if it be possible to give to matter inherent perceptivity, it is possible to transmute matter into spirit, and spirit into matter; and thus to confound

* Mark x. 21.

† Is. xxvi. 19.

‡ See Bishop Huntingford on Col. ii. 8.

all the primary and essential distinctions of things established by the Creator from the beginning. It is certainly not for man to set bounds to the potency of the Creator ; but I cannot conceive this possible, because it is contradictory, and implies confusion in the plan, principles, and congruity of things, not less repugnant than the calling of good evil, and of evil good. It is, in truth, matter of peculiar regret, to be obliged to confess that the writings of this most worthy man have given scope to materialism and infidelity, by the doctrines which we have here and in another place noticed.^f There never was a more unfortunate illustration than the *Tabula rasa*,* converting, in fact, the human mind into a blank sheet of paper, to be defaced by the veriest scribbler, or adorned by the purest wisdom, as accident may determine, uncontrolled in any shape by the law written on the human heart, by the finger of Omnipotence, the very existence of which is, of course, entirely abandoned. It is true there are redeeming passages in the writings of Mr. Locke, which lead us to believe that these are more the errors of expression than of deliberate judgment ; for of ideas he tells us,—“the mind knows not things immediately, but only by the intervention of the *ideas* it has of them. Our knowledge therefore is *real, only* so far as there is a *conformity* between our ideas and *the reality of things* :” and by idea he understands, “ whatever it is which the mind can be employed

* See Essay, B. ii. C. 1, Sect 2.

about in thinking.”* Yet it must be confessed that the conclusions of Hume, from his premises, are legitimate, and that, under the illustration we have alluded to, we can consider man no other than the mere creature of circumstance—of absolute indifference as to good or evil, save in as far as they are presented to his mind by externals; thus abandoning all moral controul from the law indited on his heart,—or rather denying its existence entirely, and explaining away all the moral distinctions—all the innate right and wrong indications of our nature. Indeed, if we follow out this admission to its fair consequences, and consider it in connection with the other tenets of Mr. Locke, as to sensation,† it is capable of being pushed to consequences destructive of human happiness here and hereafter. If all our ideas come through the senses, it may be concluded that our thoughts originated from our corporeal frames, and may (nay, must) cease with their dissolution; or if our minds be a sheet of “white paper,” for the impression of every daub, we cannot be viewed in the light of moral or accountable creatures.‡ The dangerous consequences to which some of the reasoning of this excellent§ and acute man may thus be determined, may well lead the less gifted to fear and trembling in their abstractions. Even the great

* See Essay, 8vo. Sect. 8, B. i. C. 1, p. 5; B. iv. C. 4, Sect. 3, p. 187.

† Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Subjects, p. 21.

‡ See Introduction to Beattie's Essays, 4to. p. 7.

Pyrrhonist of modern times confessed himself afraid to think.

Upon the whole, then, I conclude by observing, that although we know not what we shall be, most certainly we know what we shall not be. We shall not resume these frail and perishing tabernacles, sown in corruption, in weakness, in sin and dishonour, and finally dissolvable in the rotting loathsomeness of the grave. But we shall assume a condition enduring as immortality itself, like unto that of the angels, or of Christ—like unto God, (for we shall see him as he is)—and capable of sustaining that now insupportable flood of glory which surrounds the Eternal.* Sure we are, that the same Providence who introduced us into this life, in bodies suited to an imperfect and preparatory state, will not be wanting to our suitable accommodation as we advance in the scale of existence ; and certain we must be, that, as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the rewards which are in store for the pious and the good,—so a substance capable of sustaining this “weight of glory” shall be our portion, different from our present tabernacle, as the *final recipient* and *home* of the immortal spirit there, must be from the sepulchre and charnel-house of the loathsome carcase here,—transcending, as the joys of that righteous heaven surpass the miseries of this unholy earth,—pure as that purity which is fitted

* See 1 John iii. 2 ; 2 Cor. iii. 18.

to hold communion with a Being who cannot behold iniquity,—and eternal as that Godhead with whom we shall for ever dwell. “Glorious day (exclaims the Heathen Philosopher*), when I shall retire from this low and sordid scene, to associate with the divine assembly of departed spirits.”—“Blessed time (cries the Christian Divine†), when mortality shall be swallowed up of life, and death and sorrow shall be no more—when we shall be eased of all our pains, and resolved of all our doubts, and be purged from all our sins, and be freed from all our fears, and be happy beyond all our hopes, and have all this happiness secured to us beyond the power of time and change.” And comforting and consoling it is, to be assured by natural, by revealed religion—by the arguments of the Heathen—by the conclusions of the Christian—by the anxious deductions of philosophy—by the positive assurances of the gospel—that such a consummation must take place,—when, the present pageantry having passed away, appearances shall assume their realities, reason shall be intuition, and we shall enjoy to the utmost all the faculties of a perfect nature, unimpeded, and in a glorified state, exempt from the infirmities of our present gross bodies, and all the pollutions, wants, and desires of a fallen and degraded condition. God of our spirits! Parent of universal being! what manner of men ought we to be in this thy distant creation; and

* Cicero.

† Tillotson.

how carefully ought we to protect from all defilement that soul which thou hast destined for so glorious a scene :—For,

“ If, as holiest men have deemed, there be
A land of souls, beyond that sable shore,
To shame the doctrine of the Sadducee
And Sophists, madly vain of dubious lore,—
How sweet it were in concert to adore
With those who made our mortal labours light—
To hear each voice we fear'd to hear no more!
Behold each mighty shade revealed to sight,
The Bactrian, Samian Sage, and all who taught the right !”

LETTER XVII.

“Imagine it to be said—Love your enemies—Resist not evil—Give to every man that asketh—Lend, hoping for nothing again, &c.—must not such expressions be limited, or interpreted by the nature of things, or the true circumstances of the case? They certainly must, unless reason be discarded; and if that be once gone, we shall have no test to distinguish the will of God from the illusions of the devil, or the impostures of men.”

Sykes.

“So saying, they linked hand in hand, spread out
Their golden wings, by living breezes fanned,
And over heaven’s broad champaign sailed serene.”

Pollok.

BUT to return from this digression, we resume more closely our argument. We have the case of Esau, whom “I hated,”* in contrast with that of Jacob, whom “I loved.” Now, we have before seen,† that our Saviour uses the same expression when he requires us to “hate” father and mother, wife and children, brethren and sister, and even life itself. It is impossible, therefore, to understand the “hate” expressed in the above passages in a bad or vindictive sense, or in any other sense than com-

* Mal. i. 2, 3.

† Luke xiv. 26.

paratively, and as applicable to conduct here. We infer from our Saviour's language the paramount necessity of the love of God; and, in the case of Esau, the preference given to Jacob in this life, for Isaac "blessed Jacob and Esau concerning the things to come."*

We find it stated (in Matt. xix. 24, and in the parallel passages of Mark and Luke) to be "easier for a camel^a to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Now this, literally, is clearly impossible—quite as impossible as the impassable gulf; and the rational inference is, not that it is impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but that, from his various temptations, it is extremely difficult to do so;† yet, granting the difficulty or impossibility (when divested of a metaphorical sense) of passing an impassable gulf, or of a cable or camel going through the eye of a needle, still, as it is also said that "with God all things are possible,"‡ or rather, as St. Luke has it,§ "with God nothing shall be impossible," the point comes to be,—has God limited his power in these instances—or is he not, as it is expressly written, "able and willing to save to the uttermost?"^b which we must believe, if we believe the Scriptures,—nay, that God is.

Again, the case of Judas || is taken as a formidable

* Heb. xi. 20.

† See Chillingworth's Works, 3 vols. 8vo. vol. iii. p. 180.

‡ Mark x. 27.

§ Luke i. 37.

|| Matt. xxvi. 24.

instance against the restoration of all things. It has indeed been argued, that the sense thus implied may be entirely evaded, even when the words are literally interpreted ; for better, certainly, had it been for Judas never to have been born into life, but to have died before leaving the womb ; for then he had passed into another state sinless. And although this, perhaps, is refining too much, the inference is tenable ; nor can it be maintained (understand the passage as we may), that so formidable a doctrine can be established on a sort of proverbialism, for such the expressions appear to be ;^c and and so we find them applied in other parts of Scripture, and in classical writers. “ Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father (says Jeremiah*), saying, a manchild is born unto thee.—Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame ?” Solomon has it, that an “ untimely birth” is better than long life, “ if the soul be not filled with good.”† And Job exclaims,‡ “ Wherefore hast thou brought me forth out of the womb ? Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me ! I should have been as though I had not been ; I should have been carried from the womb to the grave.” Here Jeremiah and Job deem it better had they not been born into life,—and neither, certainly, had occasion to apprehend future perdition ; and Solomon, we see, says, generally, that an untimely birth is better

* Jer. xx.

† Eccl. vi.

‡ Job. x. 18, 19.

than a long life, unless filled with good. Now, few or none are filled with good; and, therefore, the inference is, that in general an “untimely birth” is better than the thousand evils to which human flesh is heir. “Let us not (says Tillotson*) make a mock of repentance, that which must be our last sanctuary and refuge, and which we must all come to before we die, or it had better for us we had never been born.” So may it be said of Judas,—better for that man never to have been born—better for any man—than to suffer the dreadful retributions, even in this life, (to say nothing of the next,) of a lancinating remorse for the basest of crimes.†^d

The shorter the life of any wicked man is, certainly, the better; the fewer sins will he have to answer for—much more such a criminal as Judas, “the beggarly Jew of Holbein.” And it is not possible, unless we understand the exclamation as a figure of speech, that Job should hold himself reserved for everlasting happiness—should confide in the hour when he should see God, “whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another:”‡—it is impossible, I say, that he could exclaim, (in a literal sense,) “Let the day perish wherein I was born!” and at the same time entertain a hope so full of immortality. It is true, the expressions both of Job and Jeremiah were wrung from them under the severity of

* Vol. i. p. 270, fol.

† See Matt. xxvii.

‡ Job. xix. 27; iii. 3.

affliction ; and in this view they have still a stronger claim to our indulgence, whether considered as proverbialisms of extensive latitude, or as ejaculations of hyperbolical import ; neither can our Saviour's words,* whether viewed as a mere Hebraism or rabbinical phrase, applied to the guilty criminal or peculiarly unfortunate, be understood to infer what might have been expressed without any circumlocution, or admitting of any doubt, if it had been so intended.†

Again, “ Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare,”† figuratively and prophetically, not with reference to future punishment, but to the coming horrors of the fall of Jerusalem ;—and implying, in a similar sense, that it would have been better never to have been born, than to have experienced the miseries of that desolation.

Christ came not to call the “ righteous, but sinners to repentance ;” and tribulation and anguish (it is not said to be eternal‡) shall certainly be on “ every soul of man that doeth evil ;” for assuredly there is, and can by possibility be, “ no peace to the wicked.”§

“ He that believeth not the son (says John) shall not see life.”|| On this verse much stress has been laid ; and it was pointed out to the writer of these pages, by a Divine of the Church of Scotland, as an unanswerable objection. If the reader will turn to the preceding verse, he will find the same Evan-

* Matt xxvi. 24.

† Luke xxiii. 29.

‡ Rom. ii. 9.—Matt. ix. 13.

§ Is. xlviii.

|| John iii. 36.

gelist informs us,—“ The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.” Again, (vi. 37, of the same Evangelist,) the words of Christ are,—“ All that the Father giveth me shall come to me ; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Now, we confess it is written unequivocally, (for we have no desire, quite the contrary, to conceal or evade the force of any argument on either side,)—“ He that believeth not the Son shall not see life ;” but it is also written equally explicitly, “ the Father hath given all things” (without exception) to the Son, and “ all that the Father giveth me shall come unto me.” What then, we ask, becomes of the supposed exception of him that believeth not ? If all things are given, where is the reservation ? The Evangelist must, I presume, be admitted to the privilege of an intelligible interpretation, (as we have ventured to apply to other passages, and as must be conceded to all writings and sayings, human and divine ;) and the import, when relieved of a contradictory meaning, can only exclude the unbeliever (in a Scriptural sense) while he remains in that state of unbelief. “ He that believeth not the Son shall not see life,” (as we read the words,) *while* he is yet unprepared to receive the truth as *it is* in Jesus, (not perhaps as men expound it,) who died for us all, and who is willing and able to save, and to quicken and restore the lapsed soul ; for, “ as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”* “ The fear of

* 1 Cor. xv. 22.

God (we unhesitatingly admit, in the words of an eloquent preacher) is unequivocally set against evil ; and either the evil must be sanctified into that which is good, or wholly swept away. It were a violence to his nature, that iniquity should pass either without a punishment or without an expiation. There may be some mysterious conveyance, (there necessarily must, as we believe,) an egress be found for his goodness towards the sinner ; but towards the sin, there is nought in God but the most unsparing and implacable warfare.”*

* Chalmers on Matt. viii. 11—preached at the Scottish Church, Regent Square, May 16, 1830.

LETTER XVIII.

“What is the sum and substance, scope and end, of Christ’s religion, but the love of God and man?—To which all other points and duties are relative and subordinate, as parts or means, as signs, principles, motives, or effects. Now, I would fain know how it is possible for evil or wickedness of any kind to spring from such a source?”

Berkeley.

“There surely is some guiding pow’r,
Which rightly suffers wrong—
Gives vice to bloom its little hour,
But virtue, late and long!”

Camoens.

BUT sin, it has been said, is an infinite evil, a rebellion against infinite majesty and power; and therefore it is justly obnoxious to infinite punishment. Besides, it is added, as a minor inference of the will, that an infinitely good Being must be desirous to visit sin with the greatest mark of his displeasure. Now, first, it is not clear that the Deity chose to lay the greatest possible restraint on sin—(it is not clear that he could, without disturbing the free agency of man)—otherwise he must have visited every act of commission with immediate and utter extinction; or have exhibited the retribution in

such colours as could not but appal ; or have applied the infliction in such tortures as could not but deter ; (in which view man's discretionary power and accountability are at an end.) Sin appears to be visited with a measure of punishment sufficient to mark its prohibition, and ultimately to reform, by gradually transforming the sinner, and enabling him to see, (by the exercise of his intellectual capacity,) and consequently necessitating him to shun its horrible and disgusting deformity. Sin, in truth, is the imposition of an erroneous understanding on the will, of ignorance on the judgment, calling evil good, and good evil. We pursue it because it approaches us under false colours and blandishments, and because we mistake the deceiving and evanescent appearance for real enjoyment and permanent good. It is only necessary to remove the screen from the intellectual eye, by the efforts of reason and experience, to exhibit the imposture—to secure our preference to the controlling worth, and invincible attraction, and fascinating beauty of goodness. And this Providence appears to effect, by repeated trials, and not by any sudden wrench and immediate interposition—suffers the abortion to crawl for a while in its own slime, for purposes inscrutable to us : but its destruction is not the less inevitable—the retribution is not the less certain—nor the reformation by Almighty Power, which eventually must prevail, the less secure. God forbid that we should say sin was or is

permitted to abound, that grace and pardon may the more abound. The subject, we admit, is perhaps beyond us. Our path here is, it may be, on the pathless sea ; and we take refuge in the belief, that although sin may, for a while, tyrannize over the world, in all the leprous inveteracy of moral pestilence, of transgression, of suffering, of disease, and of death, “ the infinite goodness of God shall reign, by destroying sin and death, through a righteousness of faith.”*

But, secondly, and were it otherwise, the consequence of infinite suffering would not follow ; for the measure of infliction, or of retribution, must result from the wrong done,—and no effect, the consequence of the act of a finite creation, can be elongated into an infinite operation, unless by the immediate will, influence, and power of an infinite Being ; which we deny, because we cannot infer ultimate irremediable misery from the attributes of the one merciful God of the Christians ; nor can we discover it unequivocally asserted in the revelation of his word.

The instances of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah† have likewise been produced, as examples of the irretrievable punishments of the wicked ; but if they prove any thing beyond the necessary, and visible, and inevitable results of monstrous sins, in all ages, and in innumerable

* Macknight, vol. i. p 270.

† Gen. xix. 24.

instances, even in this world, it is rather for us than against us. They are “set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire,” as we have it in Jude 7. “Turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, making them an example to those that after should live ungodly,” as we read it in Peter.* But if we turn to Ezekiel,† we find that not only shall these wicked cities be restored, but Jerusalem also, “which hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done.” If, then, they are an example of destruction, they are also an instance of coming restoration;—nay, it has been argued, that in compliance with the promise made to Abraham by God, of possessing all within his sight from the place where he then stood,‡ the Dead Sea, which now, as it is said, occupies the place of the wicked cities, must eventually be swallowed up, and the plain be given to the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And, further, it has been maintained, (from Ezek. xlvii. 8—11,) that the extreme saltness of the water shall be neutralized, or “healed,” as it is written,^b and rendered fit for the purposes and existence of the finny tribe.§ Nay, it has been affirmed by some, that fish have been caught in it, (although this is denied by the latest authority.) At any rate (Dr. Pococke is of opinion) they may live in it; and the

* 2 Pet. ii. 6.

† Ezek. xvi.

‡ Gen. xiii. 14, 15.

§ See Winchester on the Universal Restoration, p. 181.

swallows, as they skim along its surface, dip for the water necessary to build their nests. ^c

But, whatever we may make of the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, by the immediate act of the Almighty—or of Babylon, as it was predicted by Isaiah,* and decided by the arms of Cyrus and Hystaspes—or of Nineveh, as it was foretold by Zephaniah† and Nahum,‡ and utterly accomplished (ultimately I believe, by the Saracens, in the seventh century)—certain it is, that nothing can be concluded from these or any temporal examples of wickedness, and instances of consequent desolation here, as to eternal punishment hereafter, when time shall be no more.

Again, it is written in St. John,§ “ Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me ; and where I am, thither ye cannot come.” So it is spoken by Jesus to his own disciples,|| “ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me ; and, as I said unto the Jews, whither I go ye cannot come ; so now I say to you.” Yet we have it in Matthew,¶ “ Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Again, in Mark,** “ Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew†† solves the apparent difficulties of the whole :—“ Ye shall not see me henceforth, *till* ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

* Is. xiii.

† Zeph. ii. 13.

‡ Nahum iii.

§ John vii. 34.

|| John xiii. 33.

¶ Matt. xviii. 3.

** Mark x. 14.

†† Matt. xxiii. 39.

But “ He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy ;”^{*} yet “ mercy (it is added) rejoiceth against judgment.”[†] “ I will no more (as it is written in Hosea[‡]) have mercy upon the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away ;—for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God ;” yet adds the son of Beeri,—“ And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, ye are the sons of the living God.”

The words of Solomon, too, have been pressed into the argument, and interpreted as denunciations of eternal punishment in another life, although he confines his language to things “ done under the sun,” that is, to the things of the present life. And in this their only and proper sense they may or may not be true, without let or injury, save to his wisdom and sagacity—as, when he affirms of the dead,[§] that “ they know not any thing ;—neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun ;”—for, “ all things come alike to all : (in this world of which he is speaking, it may be so ; but certainly not in the next, to which his words have no reference :) there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked ; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean.”^d

* James ii. 13.

† The mercy of God is abundant.—Ps. viii. cviii. 4 ;

Exod. xxv. 21.

‡ Hosea i.

§ Eccles. ix.

It were, in truth, hopeless to attempt an analysis or explanation, satisfactory to every one, of every passage in Scripture which may be arranged for or against the doctrine of the Universalists, agreeably to the tenets of the particular party who may be the expounder. Indeed, this very diversity of opinion and of inference proves to demonstration the indiscretion, at least, of wrapping up in an article or Confession of Faith a repulsive doctrine, which is not only not revealed in Scripture, at any rate, with that clearness which can make the belief of it necessary, or the denial of it criminal ; but which has been, as we have seen, abandoned by the ablest and most illustrious men. Every passage in Scripture, every word, more particularly touching our final destiny, is replete with matter calculated to awaken our most anxious endeavours and painful anxieties for the result of our pilgrimage ; but I know of no passage which, when closely examined, can be made to amount to more than a seeming implication of the doctrine that “few only shall be saved.” In truth, the restitution of all things seems to be pretty distinctly stated in the Acts.*

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.”† Here we are told that, in the corrupt church of Sardis, some there are that have not defiled their garments—that

* See Acts. iii. 21.

† Rev. iii. 4.

shall be saved, in short—for they are worthy ; but this negative does not infer, positively, that others are beyond, or by no possibility can be brought within, the pale of salvation.

St. Paul has it, that “ though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved:”* and again, “ I have reserved to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal ; even so, then, at this present time also, there is a remnant, according to the election of grace.” Here the Apostle (the reader will bear in mind) is speaking comparatively, and of the times then present, when few (a remnant) had embraced Christianity ; but nothing can be elicited from this against the universal restoration of all men, and of all sects, in time to come. On the contrary, we think we have already shewn, that the words of St. Paul are, in a variety of instances,† on the side of the Universalists. St. John beheld “ a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,” standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”‡

“ Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find

* Rom. ix. 27 ; ii. 4, 5.— See Dr. Clarke, on these texts, vol. i. p. 389.— M'Knight.

† See Letter iv. and note e, p. 156.

‡ Rev. vii.

it ;*—for many are called, but few are chosen.† Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”‡ Now, what was true in our Saviour’s day is true in ours, although times of persecution and difficulty existed then, which are happily gone by ; but still, narrow is the way—or rather afflicted and persecuted, through the wilderness of this distracted life, is the way—and few there be that find it, in the hurry and tempest of worldly gratification and desire. We are all called,§ (that is, the privileges of the gospel are freely offered, wherever the “ glad tidings” are heard ;) but the many are unable here to stem the torrent of earthly pursuits, with what demerit God only can know. Yet, may not their deliverance be secured by further efforts, in a further state of being and progression ? Must not the Almighty have means without and beyond the discipline of this preparatory stage, of reforming or of purifying ? Or are we to deny to the infant, the idiot, or the madman, any entrance into the joys of their Maker ? But further, we are reminded, it is added by our Saviour, “ I tell you, I know you not whence ye are ; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.”|| Now, to us it appears that all these passages apply to the kingdom of Christ ; and our Saviour accordingly declares his exclusion from his kingdom of those who die in their sins, and in rebellion against God. They can have no

* Matt. vii. 14. † Matt. xxii. 14. ‡ Luke xiii. 24.

§ See Dr. Whately “ on Election.” || Luke xiii. 25, 27.

part in the first resurrection, introductory of Christ's kingdom, or in the enjoyments of that kingdom, but must suffer the torments of the second death and its consequences.

For the great and final scheme of redemption, the reader will keep in mind, is the subduing of all things to Christ, that God may be all in all; and if we hold this end steadily in view, we must consider every act and purpose as referential—as means for its accomplishment hereafter. All things were committed to Christ, with power to judge both the quick and the dead. We are expressly told that “the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son,” whose commission embracing “all things,”* is finally to restore “all things” to the Father. Hence the punishment and judgment we are considering must be in furtherance of a deputed power; and hence both the one and the other must have reference to the intermediate government of the deputed Son. The great Parent of all withdraws himself, as it were, from the intermediate and necessary scene of means, of pain, and of suffering; he deposes the great work of universal redemption—all things—to the Son, whether for punishment or for judgment; but, by the terms of the commission, all things given must be ultimately restored, so that the Father may eventually be “all in all.” Be, there-

* John v. 22.—See Ephes. iv. 10; 1 Cor. xv. 24; Col. i. 20, 25; Phil. iii. 21.

fore, our advocacy ever so lame, or our reasoning ever so inconsequential, it is clear, beyond contradiction, that the means must be subservient to the end ; and, with reference more particularly to what we have said of the attributes of the Deity, we beg the reader always to remember, that uncontrolled love urged an omnipotent Father to commission the Son, who was sent not to condemn him or the world, but through his mission that both might be saved.* To this conclusion he must come at last ; although we may not be able to conduct him through every broken pass to the end of so arduous a journey.—“ The word of Christ (says Bishop Huntingford†) must be true, and that word declares, ‘ He came to give his life a ransom for many,’‡ and ‘ that the world through him might be saved.’ ”§—“ I am the good shepherd (says our Saviour) ; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”|| “ Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold ; them also *I must bring*, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be *one fold*, and one shepherd.”

* John iii. 17, 35.

† On Matt. iv. 17.

‡ Matt. xx. 28.

§ John iii. 17.

|| John x. 11, 16.

LETTER XIX.

“ I may err and yet be saved.—In the dark and intricate walks of controversy I may make false steps, without being at all the more out of my way to blessedness.—But, if I am not a Samaritan—a doer of good—either in fact or in inclination and spirit ;—neither have aught to be loved by my neighbour, nor to be accepted by God—no,—not though I be a son of the Church, by an orthodox faith and doctrine, or even a father of the Church, a priest or a Levite.”

Thomas Firmin.

“ Thy praise, O charity ! thy labours most
Divine, thy sympathy with sighs and tears
And groans ; thy great, thy God-like wish, to heal
All misery, all fortune’s wounds, and make
The soul of every living thing rejoice.”

It has been customary for the Universalists to analyze the threatenings of Scripture, and show, either by verbal criticism, that the words in question cannot fairly be held to import the sense in which they are understood by their opponents,—or to neutralize the inferences, by quoting similar passages, where the expressions convey a limited or differing signification ;—and I have endeavoured to condense some of the most formidable arguments, sufficient certainly, if not to persuade, at least to show, the

most obdurate defender of reprobation, that the views of the "Merciful Doctors" are not without foundation ; and that the matter is by no means, as it is affected to be considered, decided against them. The reader will always bear in mind, that the point condemned by us is—misery in the issue and completion of the scheme. "I presume," (says Edwards,*) "no believer in endless punishment will plead for any degree or duration of punishment, which is not subservient to the glory of the Deity implying the greatest good of the universe. Therefore, all such punishment as is not subservient to that end, is foreign to the present question." Here the glory of the Deity is put on its proper footing—the greatest good of his universe—and with that we do not quarrel, nor do we object to the admission of punishment, so long as it produces, or tends to produce (as a means) the greater eventual good ;—but we deny that the system can be perfect or complete where it is requisite. If it be necessary in the ultimate design of creation, then one of two things follows—first, either that evil was designed—or, secondly, that it was unavoidable. If it was designed, then the Deity is not good, (I speak it, even hypothetically, not without quailing) which is a clear and demonstrative fallacy ; and if it was unavoidable, then is the work so far imperfect, and the contriver to that extent fallible, which is equally untenable. Our argument is—that evil may be

* "The Salvation of all men" examined, &c.—8vo. p. 75.

useful, unavoidable, as the means—it can never be contemplated as the end, and must finally be expunged when the work of Providence is complete. Our Saviour, we know, was permitted to endure vicarious suffering—and we are here exposed to probationary pain—even life we see is sustained by the death of the unoffending ;—but it never can be maintained, that in the issue of things, affliction in any shape can be *necessary* either for the preservation or continuance of our being. Such mediation can be required only in a state of imperfection, and can have no place in the final economy of an omnipotent and perfect Creator. During the *progression*, means may be resorted to ; but the *completion* must be the end proposed—that is the design of perfection in unimpeded operation ;—and it is absurd to suppose the ultimate design of perfection imperfect, the plan of unerring wisdom incomplete, or the working impeded by the jarring of suffering ; for this certainly would infer imperfection in the agent. Nor can I help adding, although it has been denominated a trite objection, that it seems to me there is some difficulty in apprehending why, since divines assure us that our good works cannot merit eternal life—that is, eternal happiness,—why, I say, our evil-doings should merit eternal death—that is, eternal misery. “ To this I answer,” (says Dr. South,*) “ that the case is very different in these two. In the nature of merit, it is required that the

* Vol. vii. p. 148—or Rom. vi. 23.

action be not due ; but now every good action being enjoined and commanded by the law of God, is thereby made due, and consequently cannot merit ; whereas, on the contrary, a sinful action being quite *indebitum*, altogether undue, and not at all commanded, but prohibited, it becomes properly meritorious ; and, according to the malignity of its nature it merits eternal death." Now, without breathing heresy, or splitting straws, I think such reasoning will appear to common sense altogether inconsequential ;—for,

First,—The Deity governs by rewards and punishments, and the reward of obedience to his laws (or, in other words, as we read it, the consequence of virtuous conduct,) is declared to be eternal life. But no man, it is admitted, can give exact obedience to the purity of his precepts ; and, therefore, every man must in so far fall short, and cannot merit or reach the promised reward. Nay, no finite creature can by any possibility merit an infinite reward, but in so far as he complies with the injunctions of the lawgiver, he certainly merits, at any rate, an exemption from the penalty which non-compliance in so far would have inferred. He may not, confessedly is not, able to discharge the whole obligation ; but he has merit in having struggled to do so with an integrity of purpose which cannot be unknown, and therefore overlooked, by him to whom the secrets of all hearts are known. It is true he has not, cannot of himself merit eternal life ; but if the Deity has imposed an obligation which shall merit this beyond

the possibility of erring man to perform ; (“ for on earth there is not a just man that sinneth not ; and there is none good but God,”*) He has also in mercy supplied the remedy—in the Redeemer who is the propitiation for our sins.† Yet this impugns not, disturbs not the merit as far as it goes, and God only can weigh its value ; for he only can know in how far the desire and integrity of purpose have kept pace with the power and capacity of the individual. On this subject we may reconsider a former quotation : “ And they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” “ The Church of Rome (says Dr. Clarke,‡) has upon these words founded the doctrine of merit ; and others, through fear of falling into that error, have run into the contrary extreme, and denied all necessity of virtue and good works. The truth in this, as in most other cases, lies plainly between the true extremes. Our best virtues or works are so imperfect, as to need pardon rather than deserve reward ; and if they were ever so perfect, we should still be unprofitable servants, having done only what was our duty to do. Yet, through the intercession of Christ, God is pleased to accept them, as if they were meritorious ; and by the gracious promise of God, we have as just a claim to the reward, as if it had been originally due to us of proper right. Our improvement in virtue is the ground of proportion, though not the meri-

* See Eccl. vii. 20 ; Matth. xix. 17 ; Rom. viii. 12.

† See 1 John ii. 2.

‡ Vol. i. p. 399.

torious cause of reward. So that, though the happiness of heaven be given us, not indeed for our works, yet it will be in proportion to them, and though not upon account of our virtue, yet exactly according to our improvement therein; much of what I have immediately before said will apply to this reasoning of Dr. Clarke, with whom I am sorry in any instance to differ. How our virtue can be the ground of proportion, and yet not in some degree the cause of reward, I confess I do not understand. To what purpose is a good man here exposed to trial and temptation, if the successful struggle against passion and appetite is not of itself meritorious in so far. If the Deity admits the actions of his creatures to proportion the measure of their reward, it seems to me a distinction without a difference to maintain, that the action is not the meritorious cause *pro tanto*. It is the duty of all men to obey the law of the country which has been made known to them, and under which they are contented to live; but we do not say that a man has no merit in being a good citizen, and yielding religious obedience to the law, because it was his duty to do so;—on the contrary, he merits well, and receives (under good government) in return, not only the protection of these laws and the regard of the community, but such offices as may be attainable, for his need. Neither would we affirm of two criminals under different shades of crime, that the one did not merit more or less than the other; the virtue, such as it is, or rather the

absence of crime, is here the proportion of reward ; and being the proportion, it must be, if words have meaning, the meritorious cause. Under any economy, human or divine, known to mankind, it is, as it appears to me, impossible to argue, that virtue shall not of itself merit so far. “ If by our good works (says Priestly*) we can procure the favour of God to ourselves, which is the uniform language of the Scriptures ; and yet no portion of one person’s merit be considered as capable of being transferred to another (which, indeed, in the nature of things is impossible), the very foundation of the Popish doctrine of supererogation, and consequently of indulgences, is overturned ; and yet no one false or dangerous principle is introduced in its place.”

Had Socrates no merit in controlling the waywardness of his natural temper,—in passing a life of virtue in obedience to the law of God, written on the heart of man ? Had Antony no demerit in disregarding the same law, in prostituting intellectual gifts of no ordinary standard to lust and lewdness, debauchery and crime ? “ Abraham, (we are told,) believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness ;”† so every good man who lives under the present sense of the Deity, and habitually endeavours to do the will of God, by obeying the precepts of religion, whether natural or revealed, must in so far merit, and will assuredly be dealt with in proportion to the sincerity of his practice,

* Cor. of Christy. vol. i. p. 255.

† Rom. iv. 3.

and the means of improvement placed within his reach which he may have cultivated or disregarded. "Whoever (says Seed) is a sincere natural religionist, cannot be far from the kindgdom of Heaven." ^a

Second,—That sin merits punishment,—nay, that the latter must unavoidably result from the former, is clear to demonstration ; but that "according to the malignity of its nature it merits *eternal* death"—that is, eternal suffering, (from what we have said on some of the parables,*) appears to us to be negatived by Scripture, and is assuredly by no means a consequence on the foot of reason. It merits punishment in proportion to its malignity unquestionably, more it may require, in the economy of a wrong world to deter others, but certainly not in the eventual government of that Being, who metes out to all in weight and measure according to their deserts. "Which of us here present (it is triumphantly asked) is able, in the smallest degree, to make atonement to God, for any one of those innumerable sins of thought, word, and deed, of omission and commission, by each one of which we have most righteously deserved everlasting destruction? The sacred Scriptures are clear, that "cursed† is every one that continueth not in all things writ-

* See p. 125, 126.

† Cursed is used, the reader will find in a variety of acceptations—Gen. ix. 25 ; Josh. ix. 23 ; Deut. xxi. 23, xxviii. 16 ; Psal. lix. 12.

ten in the book of the law to do them." If this reasoning be good for any thing, it must bear to be pushed to its fair consequence, and if so, not one could be saved ; for there is not one, the same Scriptures assures us, that "continueth in all things written in the book of the law to do them." Here again we are thrown upon our common sense for an interpretation ; and we unhesitatingly take comfort in the assurance of our reasoning faculties, that impossibilities cannot be exacted from us—and that Providence, as seen in the disclosures of revelation, is not only not "strict to mark," but is declared to be the "Saviour of all men ;" and has, moreover, in the completion of this gracious and merciful purpose of universal salvation, provided a Redeemer to help our infirmities, through whom, we trust, our best endeavours will be counted as righteousness for his sake, and who, in truth, was sent into the world, expressly that the world through him might be saved.*

"Thou shalt do no murder," says the law, human and divine. It is the highest crime, and obnoxious to the highest punishment. Now, take this in extreme, yet recorded, instances, the most inflexible human tribunal would find it unreasonable to condemn the perpetrator to an eternity of torture ; for, be the measure of offence what it may, being finite as to the patient, any notion we can possibly form of justice, human or divine, is outraged

* John iii. 17, 35.

by imposing an infinity of misery on the agent. Let him suffer, if you please, to the full extent of that he has inflicted—nay, let a “tooth for a tooth” be given, and over and above the “due and forfeit of his bond,” let the “Jew” have his

“Pound of flesh, to be by him cut off
Nearest the merchant’s heart”—

Yet all this will fall infinitely short of that endless misery which we are required to consider as the consequences of the malignity of the sins of a life, fleeting and temporary, such as man’s, whose days are, in truth, “a hand-breadth, and whose age is, indeed, as nothing.”

“Before my breath, like blazing flax,
Man and his marvels pass away;
And changing empires wane and wax—
Are founded, flourish, and decay.”

LETTER XX.

“ For if to have raised out of the womb of faultless, unoffending, nothing, infinite myriads of men, into a condition from which, unthinking, they should unavoidably drop into eternal unutterable sorrows, be consistent with goodness; contradictions may be true, and all rational deductions but a dream.”

Plafere.

“ Is not this all a mystery ? who shall say,
Whence are those thoughts, and whither tends their way ?”

Hemans.

It seems clear that Providence would not threaten where there was no danger, far less promise where there was no assurance ; and it may appear to some, at any rate, a more agreeable position to rest on the promises of Scripture which are explicit, than to employ our time under any attempts to explain what may by them be considered impenetrably obscure, and not to be satisfactorily elucidated by any human intelligence. And, as we have not the presumption to measure our weakness with the strength of others, or the wish to force our opinions on their better judgment ; we shall, therefore, endeavour to close with such safe and cautious reasoners (with

whose prudence we do not quarrel) on their own ground, by pointing out yet more explicitly and connectedly the passages, where the happiness of the righteous is secured beyond the possibility of cavil ; and where the restoration of all things, and the limitation of future punishment are, so far as we can discover, distinctly indicated. We shall then (doing battle with more secular weapons) pass on to the consideration of evil, and endeavour to determine, whether an eternity of evil or punishment, does not imply a positive contradiction—and whether the tendencies of things observable in this life (and of virtue in particular) do not irresistibly infer the entire destruction of evil in the next, by the inherent, necessary, and absolute prepollency of virtue, when all the causes of delinquency are removed. It is, indeed, matter of most serious reflection to consider, that while we maintain the goodness and benevolence of the Deity, and are able to repel all objections drawn from the most difficult and preplexing instances of evil, on the ground of the prepollency of good, which is all that can be required to defend our position ; it must be confessed, I say, that this most consolatory conclusion is shaken to its centre, if it be proved that, in the result, the intentions of benevolence in the Deity are frustrated, or not accomplished. If we consider that the majority of mankind are wicked, beyond all question we might—rather must—conclude (under the doctrine we are combating,) that the majority must, in the issue, be miserable ; and if we

admit a prepollency of evil in the issue, the argument for the goodness of the Deity, drawn from the appearances of this life, must be abandoned. Nay, even supposing that the prepollency in the issue is on the side of happiness—that the majority are happy—if one, even the most worthless in the wide range of creation, shall be eternally miserable, is not the argument for the goodness of the Deity affected? And is not our confidence disturbed, when we are thus assailed in the position which we rejoice to be able to maintain from the constitution of things here, that in no one instance evil or suffering is the end in view—the design contemplated? To distinguish, *in the result* of things, between designing and permitting, seems to us mere trifling. If a man could have prevented a murder, but would not, he certainly may escape from the blame of the original purpose; but he cannot detach himself from the execution and completion of it. Severity and sanguinary laws may be necessary in the progress of a perfect reformation; but the design completed, either they must become unnecessary, or if required, the design is incomplete or imperfect; or if perfect, and they are suffered to disgrace the Statute Book, the Legislature is blameable. For it is impossible to argue, either that the Deity did not perceive the result, or, foreseeing, could not have prevented it. This reasoning infers not that the Deity is the willing author of the evil of this intermediate stage, inasmuch as there are, confessedly, some things beyond the power of omnipotency itself—to work con-

tradictions—to convert a world of preparatory discipline into a scene of unalloyed enjoyment—to make a thing to be, and not to be, at one and the same instant of time—to introduce a wicked man into Heaven, or rather to make wickedness capable of enjoying holiness ; in other words, to make good evil, and evil good.

The Deity visibly operates by second causes—he foresaw the volitions of men, the actions and the result ; but he also foresaw, we must conclude, that by no effects, save those of suffering and of trial, could the imperfect creature be intimately refined up to the eventual purposes of his creation. Evil is inseparable from a state of imperfection,—and the Deity could not create an imperfect creature which should not be obnoxious to it—that is, which should not be imperfect. But remove the imperfection of the preparatory stage, suppose the design complete, and then you infallibly reach the unimpeded operation of the original pre-existent idea—the idea, which existed in the mind of the Deity previously to the fiat of the creation—the plan developed by which he unfolded into being

“ The forms eternal of created things.”

But why, it may be asked, call a creature into being, to subject him to misery in any stage? I answer, because suffering is required to prepare him for the more perfect state. Nor is it, for us, competent, to explain all the intermediate methods and modes of God’s government ;—sure we are, that

the completion of a perfect design, emanating from an all-perfect Being, can be nothing short of perfection ;—nor can its progress be obstructed by any thing less powerful than omnipotence—that is, God himself, who cannot be defeated in one design or thought.* If the interrogatory, however, be pushed somewhat further, and it be demanded, why (under the supposition of the goodness of the Deity and the admission of the doctrine we are combating) call a creature into existence, whose eventual destination of reprobation was foreseen, and yet was not obviated,—nay, whose destruction was thus secured beyond the possibility of escape by the very gift of creation—I profess not to be able to answer the query. “If it is foreseen (it is asked by Bishop Berkeley,†) that such an action shall be done, may it not also be foreseen, that it shall be an effect of human choice and liberty?” But this only removes the difficulty without satisfying it—the issue is not the less certain, since it was foreseen, whether it be considered the effect of human choice or absolute necessity. The irreversible, unavoidable bond of perdition was, according to the doctrine we are opposing, recorded by the act of creation, and foreclosed by the fiat of the Creator.

Nor is the question we are considering, to be evaded, neither is it pushed beyond its depth ; for it is unquestionably certain that Providence foresees the volitions of moral agents, the acts thence result-

* Job xlii. 2.

† Minute Philosopher.

ing, and the issues of all things. "Known unto God, (as we have it in the Acts xv. 18,) are all his works from the beginning of the world." And "no thought (as we are told by Job, in the passage before quoted,) can be withholden from him."*^a

It is not necessary for our inference, that we should reconcile the foreknowledge of God, which is unquestionable, with freedom of will in man, which appears no less so, (despite of all theory to the contrary,) from the sure experience that we are treated as if we were free. Admitting the foreknowledge of God which is undeniable, the result of eventual reprobation must have been foreseen; and here the reasoning of Cotta cannot but obtrude itself. "The fault, you say, is in man, if he commits crimes. But why was not man endued with a reason incapable of producing any crimes? How could the Gods err? When we leave our effects to our children, it is in hopes they are well bestowed, in which we may be deceived; but how can the Deity be deceived? * * * There could be no excuse for a physician who prescribes wine to a patient, knowing he would drink it, and immediately expire. Your Providence is no less blameable, in giving reason to man, who he foresaw would make a bad use of it."^b We admit the consequence of Cotta's reasoning, but (disclaiming the doctrine of the eternity of punishment) we deny the imputability of blame, on the obvious ground of necessity—

* Notes on Mor. and Met. Subjects, p. 75-240.

of the clear impossibility—the implied contradiction,—of creating an imperfect intelligence, which should not be obnoxious to the evils of imperfection, until it reaches the matured stage of spiritual being, when we infer that evil and its consequences are necessarily excluded. Even in this life we discover, that evil and its consequences are merely incidental to a state in progress—a design in advancement. The ear, we observe, was made for hearing, not for aching—the eye for seeing, not for smarting—the teeth for the purposes of mastication, not for inflicting pain. We may suffer from indigestion, but it 'never was supposed that the stomach was not intended for the purpose of digesting food.^c Calculi have been found in the bladders of infants, and mere children have been subjected to the operation of lithotomy; but this infers not malevolence, as the mature design of the agent, otherwise the formation would have been general, and a certain and uniform mode adopted of producing the misery intended. It is impossible to argue from exceptions; in any case the inference must result from the prepollency here, (although hereafter, there can be no exceptions under an universal design fully developed); and the suffering resulting in all the instances we have noticed (in all instances, without exception, cognizable by us,) is passing, not permanent—not the general rule, but the exception—not the intention, which is uniform, but the accident, which is variable, and natural to a state of imperfection. A man does not decay in

health ; but disease, as it gradually destroys, so, it ultimately relieves him from suffering, which, however it may be contemplated as the result of complicated organization in an imperfect stage, or the means of moral improvement under a system of probationary advancement, can be defended only on the ground of that change necessarily inherent in imperfection, or of that mediation, equally necessary in the progress of an ultimate design. The Deity might, for aught I can know, have subjected us to fewer casualties, to less suffering—(although, we must conclude, we are permitted all the comfort under them, which is consistent with the nature of things and the proposed result).^d Yet, admitting this supposition, it would only infer a limitation of goodness—not that the Deity was not good—only that he might have been better—that is, in our opinion, formed, be it always remembered, without access to the whole case, which as a whole, is utterly beyond our reach, and which we have not, confessedly, faculties to comprehend even in part.*

But the complexion of the whole argument is changed, when we look to the design completed ; for then it is impossible to argue, that the result, be it what it may, of suffering, or of happiness, was not intended, without inferring imperfection on the part of the contriver, either in the design or in the power to execute it—conclusions which are utterly fallacious, and which we utterly disclaim. For whether

* See Butler “upon the Ignorance of Man.”

we consider the minute furniture of our minds—the complex frame of the moral, or the stupendous glories of the visible universe, we are equally driven to confess with the learned apostle*—the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and knowledge and power of God—how past our finding out—how unsearchable by the ignorance of man !

A finite cause can by no conceivable possibility produce an infinite effect.^e That alone which is self-existent, can be necessarily infinite and eternal, and the duration of created substances can be infinite and eternal in as far only as they are inherent and essential effects of the Divine nature or self-existent cause. Truth, “the unspotted mirror of the Deity,” can no more cease to be all-powerful while God exists, than the permeating rays of the sun can cease to brighten where he gloriously shines. As there must have been a time when nothing existed, save the self-existing originating cause—and that cause cannot be wicked, but is demonstrably, on the contrary, good ; so evil must have existed, or been created, or have arisen posterior to, and is at variance with, the self-existent Deity. Come whence it will, then, it is a creation naturally or necessarily arising out of the present order of things, and posterior to the first cause. It cannot be eternal, since it is not self-existent ; nor is it an inherent and essential effect of the Divine essence. It must of consequence cease to be, when the causes originating it have passed

* Rom. xi. 33.

away—that is, when the imperfections of a state of trial in progress have ceased to operate. It is not material to this argument whence we derive evil—this much is infallibly certain—and this much is all we require to necessitate our conclusion ; it is, confessedly, a consequence—an effect posterior to the existence of the one first self-originating cause and at variance with the inherency (if I may so express it) of the one only Deity.

Vanini maintained,* that the idea of sin is a contradiction, inasmuch as a finite being cannot resist the will of an Infinite Almighty Power. Applied to the completion of things, the reasoning is, we think, correct ; but while the plan is in operation, sin may, necessarily must, arise out of the working of an imperfect state ; sin, in truth, being neither more nor less, than deviation, in some particular, from the eternal order and harmony of God's government. We are inclined to think the foregoing reasoning resolves itself into an unanswerable syllogism.

Evil, we say, is the effect of error or imperfection—(evil as a means or an end, necessarily implies imperfection).

Perfection is the absence of error ; therefore, perfection cannot be “all in all” where evil anywhere is.

In truth, to speak of evil anywhere as consistent with perfection everywhere, is just as intelligible

* See C. Ramsay, vol. i. p. 331.

as to speak of a round square. They are equally inconsistent and contradictory, and in the nature of things impossible. "If God were not perfect he were not God." Now, if it be maintained that this perfection in the Creator is yet consistent with the eternal suffering of the created out of unoffending nothing—then I confess my wits are at bay, and I have no means left, but to throw myself on the common intuitive evidence or apprehension of man—just as I would, were it asserted, that a square is a circle, or that black is white.^f But, it is an absurdity to suppose, that were any thing revealed contradictory of the moral sense, and reason, and intuitive apprehension, (which happily there is not, and cannot be) I could give my assent to it; for a lesser evidence can never overcome a greater. Scripture is addressed to reason, and for the truth of revelation, I have the evidence of testimony, and of the common and moral sense; but this evidence *rests* on the common and moral sense of man, and on the reasonable conviction of the credit due to a moral, and accountable, and sane person under given circumstances, and unbiassed by opposite causes. Now, disturb this progress, the moral and common sense of the argument, and the reasonableness of the conclusion are benighted, and the whole question is confounded. In short, if you insist that revelation has discovered that perfection in the ultimate completion of a perfect system is consistent with imperfection, evil, or suffering, reprobation or damnation, I can only answer (for the plunge is be-

yond the soundings of any argument which common sense can fathom,) that the position resolves itself into an absurdity—obscurity in the uniformity of light—opacity in the brilliancy of glory—a square in the circumference of a circle—to be and not to be essentially one and the same thing at one and the same moment of time.

LETTER XXI.

“Since we are plainly taught, that our Lord is the Saviour of all men; and it is consequent hence, that he hath procured grace, sufficiently capacitating all men to obtain salvation; we need not preplex the business, or obscure so apparent a truth, by debating how that grace is imparted; or by labouring overmuch in reconciling the dispensation thereof with other dispensations of Providence.”

Barrow.

“Thine are all the gems of Even,
 God of angels! God of Heaven!
 God of life! that fade shall never,
 Glory to thy name for ever.”

Mador of the Moor.

IN prosecuting this subject, it is necessary always to keep in view, that the point is not, what imperfect, vain, and erring men can, would, or could do, but what an uncontrollable God has clearly revealed, or may be supposed (from the consideration of his attributes, and the nature and design of creation, where revelation is silent or not explicit) to intend to do with the creature of his creation; and the question reaches, it will be observed, to the adjustment of universal being, beyond the first resurrection, and the consequences thence resulting and beyond the

second death, to the final state, in short, of those subjected to the pains of this second death, under the completion, and involved in the capacious and ultimate design of an universal, omnipotent, and omniscient, all-wise, just, and merciful Providence. And it is evident that a satisfactory solution can be obtained only—

First,—By clear, explicit, and unvarying declarations of Scriptures ; or, where these are silent, ambiguous, or incomprehensible to human intelligence—

Secondly—By the common sense of man, resulting from the due exercise of his reasoning faculties, founded on that unchangeable moral law and obligation engraven on our hearts, written in the Gospel of Christ, which our Redeemer exemplified in his life, and which we were created to obey.

Now, there can be but three opinions on the subject—

1. That of eternal punishment, properly and metaphysically so called.

2. That of limited punishment terminated by annihilation—and

3. That of limited punishment—some punishment short of eternity, and terminating in the universal restoration of things.

Of the first, I have already said enough—and, of the second, perhaps, I need only advert to three reasons, which, in my mind, negative the force of all arguments for it.

First,—I do not find the word death (introduced into the world, we are told, by the sin of Adam,)* understood, in Scripture, as by any means importing annihilation, properly so called, but merely the termination of one state of being—change in short—the commencement of, and the introduction into, some other state of existence. Neither can the second death of Scripture import annihilation, for after it there shall be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And both reason and observation confirm the inference. Nay, under the contrary supposition of annihilation, properly so called, the language of the great Apostle is unintelligible, or rather wildly contradictory. For† he tells us, that “the *last* enemy that shall be destroyed is death,” it shall be “swallowed up in victory;” for Christ “must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” Now, who is the conqueror here? Not this last, this second death, for it shall be destroyed and swallowed up in victory. Yet this death must be the conqueror, if we suppose the subject of its influence annihilated, and equally so, if we suppose this death eternal. The death here spoken of, is evidently a stage to somewhat further; and its being swallowed up in victory, implies, at any rate, the utter termination of that stage, and (as we read the sense of the whole) the triumph of the kingdom of the Eternal.^a—Secondly,

“Look nature through, ’tis revolution all—
All change—no death.”—

* Rom. v. 12.

† See Rom. vi. ; 1 Cor. xv.

Experience and observation enable me to conclude thus far—that matter while it undergoes change, is not subject to perish utterly. Nothing in short is lost—the rain, which is evaporated from the sea, returns to its source after refreshing the earth with showers, and feeding the springs and fountains necessary for the purposes of life.^b The body, which is fed on the productions of the earth, returns to, and commingles with its parent dust ; and the whole circle of the seasons is but one round of death and resurrection. If, then, nothing material perishes, to infer that the soul does so at death, is a conclusion in opposition to the whole analogy of Nature and Providence. That it exists is the most certain of all truths, (if we except the being of a God, with which and the existence of whose attributes it is indissolubly connected) and capable of the most explicit demonstration,*—and, therefore, far less can I conclude, that this—that any *intelligent* being has been called into existence for purposes of progressive improvement which it has been found incapable of fulfilling, and which has, in consequence, been annihilated. For this is unanswerably to infer inability on the part of the contriver, to frustrate omnipotence as powerless—perfection as fallible ; and to conclude for the mutability of an immutable design. God must have foreseen the eventual purpose of his creation ; and to call into being that which he found himself under the necessity of destroying,

* See Stewart's Act. Powers, vol. 2. p. 174, and part of Note C. p. 144.

from its inherent incompetency for the end designed, is to infer all these wild conclusions and absurd contradictions.

Thirdly,—“All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth”* at the resurrection. Now, to what purpose are the wicked to be raised? Merely to be destroyed, say the annihilists. But, 1st, There must be, for disproportionate offences, relative degrees of punishment in the next life;† and this would infer an equality. 2dly, The word destroyed, (and we conceive undeviating signification essential) does not invariably signify annihilation, and is often synonymous with great sufferings, or judgment.‡ “Israel, (it is written) thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help.” “The wicked is reserved to the day of destruction.” And certainly, “everlasting punishment,”§ be its full import what it may, can in no sense import insensibility to infliction, or extinction of being. 3dly, And unanswerably—it is inconsistent with the character, and contradictory of the attributes of the Deity, to call into existence a majority—nay, even one of his intelligent creation, only to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season in this life, and then to be publicly exterminated by a revolting death in the next. For “that God preserves the wicked, only to destroy them, and display his vengeance against them,” (to use the language of Calmet||) is a doctrine

* See Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Subjects, q. p. 199.

† See p. 125. ‡ See Hosea xiii. 9.; Job xxi. 30. § Matt. xxxv. 46. || Vol. 2, Fol. Dict. p. 441.

which we unhesitatingly reject. Yet further, we would observe—the death, sufferings, and resurrection of Christ for the sins and justification of men, seem to us at once to demolish the idea of annihilation and the doctrine of eternal reprobation. For under that belief, what benefit have sinners (whom he expressly came to save) derived from his propitiation? If Christ had not offered himself up for sinners—death and no resurrection, or at most, retribution on the foot of natural religion, for the sins done in the body, were the *apparent* doom of all. But, if they are raised from the dead through his sacrifice, merely to be annihilated, they are, in consequence, it would seem, subjected to the misery of a second death. Again, if the doctrine of eternal punishment be admitted, how are we to reconcile this with the declared scriptural facts, that Christ “died for all”—that “he came to call sinners, not the righteous, to repentance”—that he was sent into the world, “that the world through him might be saved”—that he is the “Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world—that he hath absolutely “abolished death,” for in him “shall all be made alive.”*

As Providence foresaw, previously to the sacrifice of Christ, that a given individual was, and would be, among the reprobate, that sacrifice, it would seem, we are required to believe, in no way affected his doom; and he has derived no benefit from the

* 1 See Cor. xv. 3., 2 Cor. v. 15.; John iii. 17., i. 29.;
2 Tim. i. 10.; Heb. ii. 8.

death of the Saviour of all men, without exception, but especially of those who believe.*

To say that the sacrifice reconciled the sinner to an offended God, and admitted him to salvation, on performance of the required conditions of repentance and amendment of life, is merely trifling, so far as the argument in hand is concerned ; for God foresaw that he would disregard all the invitations of proffered grace ; and yet Christ was suffered, nay, appointed to die, expressly to call sinners to repentance—of consequence, if there be one reprobate, his death has been so far ineffectual, and the means chosen by an all-powerful God has been powerless to that extent. Nay, God must have foreseen—predetermined the death of Christ ; and yet (according to the doctrines of election and reprobation) in the case of the elect that was unnecessary—in the case of the reprobate it was ineffectual. But I lose myself amid such intricacies—and I leave it to those who would be wise beyond the common sense of their fellows, and above what is clearly written, to cut the knot which, in my weakness, I cannot untie. Happy, it may be, are the easy-minded among us, and perhaps the less enquiring, (for one is sometimes afraid to begin to think too curiously,) if they can rest satisfied, and may but see and practise, the precepts of essential obligation, which lie in the humble path of life, and which, like flowers scattered along the wanderings of the pilgrim, are

* 1 Tim. iv. 10.

mercifully thrown across the thorny journey of his existence, that it may sometimes be a way of rejoicing, and its toils, a labour of occasional repose, in the refreshing consciousness of a faithful discharge of duty here, and the sublime hope of a blessed immortality hereafter.

“The beings of the mind are not of clay ;
Essentially immortal, they create
And multiply in us a brighter ray
And more beloved existence.”

LETTER XXII.

“ Earth, and Hell, and Sin, shall yield to God’s almighty word.”

Marsden.

“ But not till time has calm’d the ruffled breast,
Are these fond dreams of happiness confest.
Not till the rushing winds forget to rave
Is heav’n’s sweet smiles reflected on the wave.”

Rogers.

I PROCEED now very briefly to review the ground, from revelation, of the opinions entertained by the Universalists, anticipating that candour and good feeling which the celebrated Augustine* displayed towards the Manicheans—and that peaceful and gentle (I had almost said gentlemanly) bearing, which he recommended and pursued towards those, who, even in his days could not believe that everlasting punishment would be inflicted on those condemned to the pains of Gehenna; but (on the contrary,) that after certain periods they would be restored and delivered from their sufferings.† And

* C. D. Lib. xxi. c. 17. † See Dr. Lardner’s Gospel History.

I beg to premise, if it should be objected, that I lean more to the promises than to the threatenings of Scripture, that I admit the charge—for,

I desire to cling to what is clear and explicit, both from nature and revelation, in the character of the Godhead—Benevolence ;—nor can I imagine “what else deserves the name of perfection, but benevolence, and those capacities or abilities, which are necessary to make it effectual, such as wisdom and power.”*

And I apprehend the reader will agree with me in thinking, that the threatenings—the dismal sides of the question—have been, and are sufficiently sounded—sufficiently denounced by every militant theologian, to be fully known and duly appreciated by every reflecting Christian. Men of the world, or those who reject religion and revelation, care, I am quite aware, for none of these things—the waking dreams, (the *ægri somnia*) to them it may be, of well-meaning, but of sick and visionary minds ; and I presume not to imagine, that any thing I can say could disturb their repose. It is to the humble enquirer that I address myself—to the man who has tasted the waters of this life and found them bitter—who has experienced by long and patient and painful thinking,^a that in his most sceptical moments, it is impossible to do more, than to doubt of Christianity—who has found the misty frost-work of his misgivings melt before the intensity

* Hutchison's Inquiry, p. 304,

and warmth and steady light of the gospel of Jesus, as often as he has fairly encountered its searching beams—gazed on its *deep* philosophy, or listened to its heavenly wisdom ;—who has imbibed the spirit of that gospel, as he has learned it in the peaceful sinless life of Christ, not as it is disfigured in the polemical pages of laymen, distorted in the mystifying commentaries of divines, or disgraced in the undivine controversies of worldlings. Sick and weary of these interminable discussions, the writer of these pages set himself down to a patient examination of the Christianity of Jesus ;—he had withstood the coarse and indecent ribaldry of Paine—the inconsistencies and abuse of Bolingbroke—the ridicule and flippancy of Voltaire—the minute detail, yet subtle casuistry of Bayle—the sentimental infidelity of Rousseau—and the historical scepticism and agreeable pleasantries of Gibbon ;—but he confesses he had almost fallen before the easy negligence and gentlemanly bearing of Hume,^b—the apparent indifference, yet acute dexterity of that wonderful man in exciting suspicions, eliciting quibbles, and evolving argument, out of the darkness and confusion and baseless uncertainty he has previously created.* Escaped from the more perplexing trammels of the great sceptic of modern days, whose system is one of universal doubt, and whose reasoning is, in truth, a “species of sensation,”^c (or rather “bundle of perceptions”)—the result was a con-

* See Hume's Treatise of Human Nature.

straining of belief from the preponderating weight and strength of decisive evidence. “When I look abroad (says Hume, too truly we admit) I foresee on every side, dispute, anger, calumny, and detraction. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but *doubt* and ignorance.” Yet belief can only be the result of evidence—and certainly there is no enduring comfort but in truth—in the sweet philosophy of religion, pure and undefiled—whose consolations alone can reconcile a reflecting mind to the evils of the present scene. Be it ours, to look for this comfort and to hope for its peace, not in the terrors but in the mercies of the Lord.—Going forth in our mind’s eye, and exploring the eventual sanctuary of his redemption—we rest our broken spirit on the contemplation of his goodness, and the display of his benevolence, seen in the beautiful garniture of the material world, and written in those lessons of charity, and of good will, which Jesus delivered unto all men.—Thus perceiving in the close of our aspirations, the moral purpose of this vast creation, teeming with remedial operations—and hence exhibiting its entire subordination to the gracious design, even now unfolding itself, of an universal empire of happiness and love. We say even now, for that man can have reflected little, who has failed to discover that this jarring scene is unfitted, and cannot have been designed for the calm and tranquil happiness of a rational and virtuous being.—Man himself is literally a child of misery, of sin, and of error, whose freedom

from the thralldom of vice—whose permanent enjoyment of his intellectual liberty can be obtained only by resisting the allurements of sense—by withdrawing from the delusion of external appearances, and fastening on the abstractions of reason and religion—thus controlling the besetting influence of objects which really dazzle only to deceive, and thus enabling him to set a just value on the relative importance of the seen and the unseen ; the former hastening (as we all feel) to change and decay—the latter alone being durable and solacing. Impressed with these convictions, which experience will force upon us all ; but satisfied of the existence of a benevolent Deity, who proclaims to our every sense, the fact of his being and of his superintendency—yet goaded by the stirring evidence of wrong, and the piercing cry of evil in this unhappy world, we are literally driven to the conclusion, both of philosophy and religion (as we read the inference,) that the evident design of goodness is only in progress here, but must ultimately be developed hereafter, in some future state, to which rational beings, in the full and perfect energy of their reasonable faculties, are adapted, and in which, as a necessary consequence, evil and suffering and wrong can have no place.

LETTER XXIII.

“ Though for the present ‘ you groan, being burdened,’ learn to forget your griefs in expectation of the glory which shall be revealed in you.”

Robinson’s Scripture Characters.

“Sighing, as through the shadowy past,
Like a tomb-searcher, memory ran,
Lifting each shroud that time had cast
O’er buried hopes.”

More.

It is remarked by Mr. Simpson,* that the “adjective *αἰώνιος*^a is, fifty times out of the seventy in which it is used in the New Testament, applied to the future state of the righteous, and is then, except in a few cases, joined with ζῶν life, which among the Hebrews figuratively denoted happiness also. This implies continued existence, and favors the idea of proper eternity. On the contrary, as it is never joined with life or continued being when it is applied to the wicked, this leads us to understand

* Essay on Future Punishments, p. 86.

it in such instances, as denoting limited duration." And it is very remarkable, as Mr Winchester* observes, that St. John never uses the word to set forth the duration of punishment, but always as implying the well-being of the righteous. To place the matter beyond all cavil or doubt, however, we have numerous assurances in Scripture, a very few of which only I subjoin, in a connected shape that their force may be better appreciated; for, believing them, we may say, with Milton—

“ Then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this paradise, but shalt possess
A paradise within thee, happier far.”

“ Israel (says Isaiah) shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”† “ Ye shall receive a crown of glory,‡ an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.”§ “ A kingdom which cannot be moved.”|| “ I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.”¶ “ Neither can they die any more.”** Now, it is impossible to misunderstand these gracious promises uttered by our Saviour himself. He tells us of the virtuous, “ neither can they die any more;” “ they shall never perish,” “ never die;” they shall “ not die;”†† and it is remarkable, that we no where read of the punishment of the wicked, as we do of the happiness of

* On the Univ. Rest, p. 28. † Is. xlv. 17. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 4.

§ 1 Pet. i. 4. || Heb. xii. 28. ¶ John x. 28.

** Luke xx. 36.

†† John vi. 50.

the good, that it shall have no end, “world without end;”* but were it otherwise, we have here the words of our Saviour, which must controul all imaginary or supposed inferences. And it is obviously a fallacious conclusion, that eternal, applied to the blessed, must be limited in its duration, if it be so understood when applied to the wicked,† in so far as the substantives which controul the adjective, are, in their sense and meaning, wide as the poles asunder. More especially will this appear, if we consider that all the temptations which assail us in this life are removed by death; and hence it is not possible that the virtuous man here, amid so many temptations, shall not continue to be virtuous, or rather shall become vicious, hereafter, when all the causes of delinquency are removed. Yet further, and waving, for a moment, the positive assurances of Scripture, that the good shall not die eternally—for die all must ‡—nay, admitting the above impossibility (just as impossible as that the rays of the sun when shaded by any intervening object, shall not resume their original splendour when that object is removed) still it will make nothing at any rate against the promised happiness of the good, which stands recorded by the finger of Providence in characters indelible, and independently of all connection and juxtaposition, in language not to be misapprehended by any possibility, or misinterpreted by any ingenuity. Nay,

* Is. xlv. 17. † See Notes on Rel. Mor. and Met. Sub. p. 93.

‡ See Note a, p. 92.

St. Paul tells us, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ;"* words, the full import of which in the original, cannot be given in any† translation ; for the glory implied is not only termed *ᾠωνιον*, according to our translation, eternal, but it is (if I may so express myself) elongated and secured beyond the possibility of doubt, by a redundancy of metaphor. One thing would seem to be implied by this celebrated passage, and it strengthens the reasoning of the Universalists, that the word *ᾠωνιος*, which is translated by us eternal, and which is taken erroneously (as we have endeavoured to shew) to convey by itself invariably an eternity, properly so called, does not carry in St. Paul's mind the full import of the glory to which he here directs our thoughts and aspirations (*καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰωνιον βαρος δοξης*, a glory exceedingly greater, far more than *ᾠωνιον*.^b) Doubtless it may be said, that *καιρος* and *ᾠων* are in the very next passage used, the former as applied to things seen and passing, the latter to things not seen and eternal—and the argument is good, so far as it reaches, in contrasting antithetically the things seen as evanescent, and the things not seen as durable, or *ᾠωνιον*, or eternal as the meaning may be supposed to imply (we may doubt, however, whether *all things*, not at *present* seen, are eternal, properly so called, although, comparatively

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

† See Doddridge's Family Expositor, 4to. vol. 4. p. 458.

speaking, they are eternal in contradistinction to the passing pageantry before us.)^c But in whatever way we interpret this passage, however it may corroborate, it cannot in any view enervate our previous reasoning, or narrow the import of the extended sense implied by the redundant metaphors of the Apostle in the words now before us.

Neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, can separate the righteous from the love of the Deity. They are emphatically called in Scripture “the children, the heirs of God, and joint heirs of Christ.”* “Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.”^d† Neither are these strong expressions more than we might infer from the nature and reason of the thing; for if God be truth, which shall endure for ever, and if virtue be a substance which shall never die, most assuredly, the nearer we approach to truth and virtue, the more immediately do we become enveloped by the divine essence, and the more intimately blended with, and penetrated and sustained by, that uniform effusion of the divine life, which can suffer neither diminution nor decay. And since these explicit declarations of divine goodness and the nature of things lead us irresistibly to the conclusion, that if God had reserved eternal punishment for the wicked, it would have been revealed, at least, with equal certainty, much more ought they to constrain us to

* See Rom. viii.

† Heb. vii. 16.

thankfulness, and direct us to the adoration of that blessed Providence, who has thus announced, in language, (intentionally, as it were,) admitting of no doubt, even from the most subtile refinement of men, the preference he has given to virtue, and the portion which lies before the pious and the good. Nay, generally, as we must conclude, that in this life, no one innocent pleasure which could have been safely conceded to us is withheld, so, in a more exalted state, we shall experience the fruition of the highest and noblest degree of happiness of which our nature is capable.—And if the Book of God's hallowed Word assures us of this, and the Book of his glorious Works, so far as we understand it, appears so excellent and reasonable, in all its various and beautiful relations, is it not right to believe, that what is now illegible to ordinary, or corporeal, or mixed natures, will, when lighted up by the brilliancy of an immortal transparency, and seen and read by the optics of an improved, and expanded, and glorified intelligence, appear still more excellent, and still more and more reasonable. Thus may we conclude, shall our expanding faculties expatiate over scenes of expanding excellence, until enlarged and refined to the full measure of our future spiritual capacity, they become enamoured of the beauty of holiness, and are prepared for the enjoyment of the Eternal. Nor can we imagine, that under this gracious universality of an omnipotent Providence of mercy, the trail of the serpent shall be visible, or

the pains of suffering, or the wailings of sorrow, have place, or be permitted to disturb the unbroken harmony which shall teem from every corner of creation—the sacred calm of peace and of serenity,—the abiding sense of possession and of security,—the thrilling accents of joy and of gladness,—the life—the light—the glory—the extacy—which shall effuse from the centre of all perfection, with the uniform regularity of a pervading and an exhilarating circulation, permeating the remotest being, of this mighty, and holy, and sinless population. Nor, are these the ravings of a dreamer, warmed, as he no doubt might well be, by the breathing intensity of the glowing aspiration; the blessed scene is one of reasonable expectation, (and we have throughout disclaimed, for we required it not, any unreasonable inference) as well as of Scriptural promise, for, as no man can permit that to take place in which he has no pleasure—which he abhors, and over which he has controul—much less can we suppose the Creator of man, the King of kings, and the Lord of heaven and of earth, overruled by any such contradictory necessity. “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his ways and live.”* “Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me,—that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth—for in these

* Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

things *I delight*.”* And strange it would be, indeed, if we could suppose the omnipotent King of glory—the Lord of universal being—the God of love, and the source of all consolation—contemplating the death of a sinner, or happy under the knowledge of his eventual and eternal misery.† No ; we believe that although the happiness of the Deity is independent of every object of his creation, and necessarily must be complete in the enjoyment of his own infinite perfections,—still we cannot imagine its existence compatible with the knowledge of misery in the issue. And, perhaps, the stirring language of rejoicing^e is not inapplicable even to the Godhead, when we picture the benevolent Parent of the universe beholding the glory of such emanations as we have attempted to body forth, and viewing, in the ultimate perfection of his own works

“ Where the heavens are calm above us,
And as calm each sainted breast,”‡

Images of his own infinity, of his own holiness and happiness, purity and peace.

* See Jer. ix. 24. † See p. 62, and Is. xlix. 15.

‡ See Hooker, vol. i. p. 133—3 vols. 8vo.

LETTER XXIV.

“All things in the world are said, in some sort, to seek the highest, and to court more or less the participation of God himself; yet this doth no where so much appear as it doth in man.”

Hooker.

“Yet oft a sigh prevails and sorrows fall,
To see the hoard of human bliss so small.
And oft I wish, amidst the scene to find
Some spot to real happiness consign’d,—
Where my worn soul, each wandering hope at rest,
May gather bliss.”

Goldsmith.

WITHOUT wearying the reader, by an exact recapitulation, I must here take leave, (under the censure of repetition,) to remind him of some of the more prominent texts and assurances of a general restoration of all things. God is generally described in Scripture as the Father, Creator, and uncreated cause of all things—“He is love,” “his tender mercies are over all his works”^{*}—he created man to glorify his name here, and to enjoy his presence hereafter. “God (says Jeremy Taylor†) is pleased

^{*} See 1 John iv. 8, 19, 16.; Ps. cxlv. † Taylor’s Dis. vol. ii. p. 75.

to say that our sins dishonour him, and our obedience does glorify him." He sent the Redeemer into the world, "not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."* He hath sworn "that unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear;"† every knee shall bow, "of things in heaven, things in earth, and things under the earth."‡ His uncontrollable pleasure is, to "gather together (or re-unite *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι*) in one all things in Christ,—to reconcile all things unto himself, by him,—whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven;"§ "he will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."|| He is the "living God who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe." a ¶ Christ came down "from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of Him that sent me." Now, what is the "Father's will, which hath sent me"***—that "of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Again what hath the Father given the Son—"he hath given all things unto his hands," (says the same evangelist) and we are assured by Christ, "that all that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." Here, we observe no exception, all "shall come to me," and by conse-

* John iii. 17. † Is. xlv. 23. ‡ Phil. ii. 10.

§ Eph. i. 10, 22.; Col. i. 20. || 1 Tim. ii. 4. ¶ 1 Tim. iv. 10.

*** See John iii. 35.; vi. 37, 38, 39.; xiii. 3.; Matt. xi. 27.

quence none shall “be cast out.” Christ receives all things, without exception, from the Father, and shall re-deliver the whole at the last day—that is, when his mediatorial government shall end, and “God shall be all in all.” We are assured (be it repeated even to tediousness) that all, without exception, shall come unto Christ, (there is no reservation, the assertion is imperative and absolute) and shall in no wise be cast out by him ; consequently, the re-delivery to the Father must consist of all, without exception.^b When this “coming^c unto Christ” may be, is another question—his kingdom reaches beyond the grave ;—but, come when it will, and be the resumption of the government by the Father when it may, the declaration is unequivocal—the inference is certain, that the re-delivery in its original integrity must take place—nay, independently of this absolute assurance of an universal re-delivery, we cannot suppose, that they who shall come unto the Son, and who must have previously been awakened to a sense of truth, and the consequent and necessary detestation of sin, can be obnoxious to the Father, whose will the Son came to perform, and of whose will he must consequently have had a knowledge before he could be commissioned to do it. But the truth is, (as, indeed, generally happens with all explanations of Scripture) the words of the Evangelist, and of Christ, admit of no commentary which does not tend to confuse the simplicity and clearness of the text. The context is here the centre—the commen-

tary the invisible circle, or in Scriptural language, it “darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge.”*

Now, what are the inferences to be drawn by a man of common understanding from those few texts, which we have more particularly recapitulated in this and the preceding letter?—clearly that, if happiness be revealed for the good, happiness, too, eternal beyond the possibility of doubt, and made as if by purpose and intention so express as to admit of no dispute, (whatever difference of opinion may arise as to the duration of the sufferings of the wicked)—if the righteous shall have no part in the second death, which is reserved for the wicked, it appears indisputable, be that second death what it may,

1st, That there shall be a reconciliation and reunion of all things in Christ;—and

2dly, That God shall be all in all.†

And that these things are revealed in Scripture, seems just as indisputable as language (apparently intentionally distinct) can make it. It would, doubtless, be consolatory, could we explain all difficulties—and more particularly, if we could satisfactorily reconcile the supposed punishments with these asseverations. But whether we can do so or not, it affords no argument against the express promise, that the extent of the implied commination is unintelligible to us—nay, is even incom-

* Job xxxviii. 2.

† See p. 25, and 1 Cor. xv.

patible in so far as we see, with the discharge of the promissory obligation. That the promises of God must be fulfilled to the letter, no man can doubt who believes that God is. This position there is no disputing. And under this conviction it is for us to reconcile the real or supposed threatenings if we can; if we cannot,—to ascribe the inability to the weakness of our present state, hiding from us some feature in the case, which, if known, would in fact alter the whole nature of the question, and enable us to see our way without inferring any contradictions in the issue, or touching the full discharge of all the promises of a faithful Creator, or reprobating any one of the perfect and uniform attributes of an all-wise Divinity.

No man unquestionably, (independently of an explicit and undeviating revelation) is entitled to assert the eternity of future punishments—who is unable to reconcile this fearful doom with the promises, the character and the attributes of the Deity, considered, not with reference to the incomplete or progressing design, but to the final consummation of all things, and the settled accomplishment and full developement of the universal plan of happiness and peace.

“ God, to remove his ways from human sense,
Plac’d heav’n from earth so far, that earthly sight,
If it presume, might err in things too high,
And no advantage gain.”

Of this truth, no one can be more sensible than

the writer of these pages. Yet as he cannot, even on Scriptural grounds, reconcile these supposed everlasting inflictions with the restoration of all things, which, he has endeavoured to shew, is distinctly indicated in the Gospel,—nor discover under any view, natural or revealed, why punishment should be eternal, or how man can be incorrigible under the scheme of an universal plan of redemption and love, emanating from an uncontrollable power,—he has attempted, in the foregoing pages, to obviate the apparent contradictions which the subject presents. And it has appeared to him,^c that there is good ground from Scripture—certainly from reason—to believe that all these threatenings have reference to a state before Christ shall have delivered all things over to God, that the Deity may be “all in all;”—which is clearly revealed, which therefore must take place, and which it seems to him impossible and contradictory to suppose, under the admission of co-existent and co-eternal misery and pain. The exact import, perhaps, of these comminatory pains may be disputable—perhaps at most they amount to threatenings, as Tillotson supposes; and it is not necessary to the justice and veracity of God to execute these threatenings, while both are pledged (independently of his essential attributes) to the execution of promises which are admitted on all hands to be clear and express. Whichever way, however, we dispose of the threatenings, the promises must infallibly be fulfilled—promises which,

we think, are necessarily incompatible with the doctrine of eternal punishment, and equally compatible with the deductions of reason and religion ; for it is impossible to believe, without an express, explicit, and uncontrollable revelation, that God has created any intelligence pure, as we must conceive the human soul to be,^d and capable of the most exalted endowments of knowledge and happiness without end, yet condemned here to enjoy the shadowy pleasures of sin for a season, and hereafter to suffer the pains and miseries of the damned for evermore. I say condemned, for the pleasures of sin are a contradiction not more in language than in reality,—they are condemnatory penalties for paltry and passing gratification ; and, if there be no world beyond the present scene, man is certainly of all animals the most miserable. Yet if, for the wretched vices, and vain enjoyments, and transitory errors of this brief life, the sinner can hope for no pardon here or hereafter, then truly is his condition more deplorable than that of the beasts that perish ; and, so far as I can discover or be made to understand, his *being* rather a theme for the house of mourning, than a song for the house of joy.

LETTER XXV.

“As sin brought sin suffering into the world, suffering must put an end to sin.”

Jones.

“All feeling of futurity benumb’d,
All relish of realities expir’d,
Renounc’d all correspondence with the skies,
Embruted every faculty divine,
Heart-buried in the rubbish of the world.”

Young.

PERHAPS the most dismaying argument against the restoration of all things, is to be found in the desperate state of the wicked in this world, and the almost apparent impossibility (as is somewhere observed) even for God to forgive sin.* There is assuredly a recoil of the Divinity from all contact and from all approximation to sin; and it is this recoil—this repulsion (if we may so express it) of all sinful pollution, nay, of all human weakness—that absolutely constrains a devout man sometimes to despair, and drives him, in utter fear, away from the confidence and the hope of redemption. When he reasons of the transgressions of his youth—of

* See Notes c and d, p. 225—226.

the errors of his riper years—of the infirmities and aberrations which beset and cleave even to the evening of his life, to the maturity of his judgment, and the decay of youthful passion—he may not but be moved to sorrow and shame amid so much cause for trembling. And happy is that man who, in the retrospect of a trying and busy life, finds nothing to remind him of the more deplorable offences of humanity ; whose conscience acquits him of rapine and of fraud ; who has not betrayed the confidence of innocence, or shared the wages of iniquity ; who finds in the record no dark crimes of desperate wickedness, or of deliberate maturity—from the sharp tooth of which he cannot flee, and from the pangs of whose memory he may not escape the vengeance of an ever-reproaching recollection ; no bloody hand which refuses to be washed, and which is ever and anon pointing to the book of count and reckoning. True, the best will find in recollections of the past enough for sadness ; but if this sorrow and sickness of heart be supported by the consciousness of unflinching integrity throughout, of a singleness of purpose towards man, and a soundness of devotion towards God—be it commingled with much of the infirmity of youth, checquered with many of the follies of manhood, yet bloated by no inveterate turpitude within, and, it may be, relieved by some of the virtues of wisdom and of age—the prospect is not dismaying.^a For the whole life of man is but a struggle between the turbulent cravings of the flesh, and the denying watchfulness of

the Spirit ; and the merit or demerit cannot be meted (by Him who cannot be deceived) by the success of our endeavours—but by the measure and proportion of their integrity and our ability, considered with reference to the force of the temptation, and the nature, and circumstances, and speciality of the case. The preacher from the pulpit, and the student in the closet, who have learned and know man in the genus, but are utterly ignorant of the species—its various infirmities and temptations, in its numerous relations and situations—may declaim against human iniquity, and the *unpardonableness* of human folly. But what is the worth of that virtue, which has never been exposed to danger in the chase of honors, of pleasures, of ambition, or of riches,—or the value of that wisdom, which has not been bought by experience of man as he moves in the wide world, and is acted on by all its countless springs and interests, and pecuniary collisions? The greatest liberty a human being can possess, and the greatest happiness he can enjoy, is obedience to the precepts of reason and religion ; and this great truth man will in the end effectually learn, by intercourse with his fellow-men, by experience of the *real* (not the apparent) value of this world's gains, and by a knowledge of the utter poignancy of all sin, and the utter (because ultimate, if not immediate) pain resulting from all and every pollution, and all and every unreasonable gratification. The man of books only will arrive at the same truth by the successful study and anatomy

of the human character, and he will reason out the conclusion by a legitimate train of moral deduction ; but the shrewd and thinking will reach it sooner or later by the most impressive of all teachers—experience. It is not by mere academic acquisitions (inestimably valuable as they confessedly are) that the human mind is to be dissected, and the human character analyzed : this important knowledge is to be matured by intercourse with the world—with man in various countries and climates, and under various forms of government—and by that wide-spread and searching information hence resulting, which enables him eventually to judge of his substantial interests—of the real, *not* the seeming value and relation of things—and to detect and separate the accommodating results of human conduct, arising out of external circumstances, from those original springs of human action which lie imbedded in the human heart, which are the same in all countries and in all ages, which really constitute the human character as it fell from the Deity, and with reference to which, its merit or demerit must be determined hereafter, as they have been used or abused under given circumstances of temptation and trial, which can only be known to the Searcher of hearts. Now, keeping in view the reflections which arise out of this digression, and with reference to the atrocity yet pardonableness of sin, we must remember some of our former reasoning.

1st, That all things with God are possible, not implying contradiction ; and under this, we must

admit the power of Omnipotence to reclaim the most abandoned of men. “I have seen (says Lavater*) the worst of men, in their worst of moments; yet could not all their vice, blasphemy, and oppression of guilt, extinguish the light of good that shone in their countenances,—the spirit of humanity—the ineffaceable traits of internal eternal perfectibility.”

2d, The very purpose of Christ’s coming was, that “he might destroy the works of the devil.” † “He came to save sinners;” ‡ nay, was suffered—appointed—to die, to call sinners to repentance, one and all. Yet, if there be one reprobate, his death has been in so far ineffectual; and the means chosen and effect anticipated by an omniscient and all-powerful God, have been—to that extent, at any rate—powerless and unforeseen.

3d, And, waving these arguments, when no contradiction appears, it is not for our limited capacities to doubt the means. Whatever is revealed by an incomprehensible God must, in its accomplishment, be attended with apparent incomprehensibility to us; (mere difficulty is nothing to the point, for every thing is attended with difficulty); but when that incomprehensibility infers not a contradiction, or an absolute demonstrable impossibility, it is unwise to suspend our conviction,—for this is merely

* Physiognomy, translated by Holcroft, 3 vols. 8vo. vol. ii. p. 12.

† 1 John iii. 8.

‡ See 1 Tim. i. 15; Note 1; p. 68, and p. 197.

substituting human conjecture, as to means, for the accomplishment of divine purposes—imagining and not reasoning—which cannot in any respect be safely trusted to, and which may, and in all probability will, end in utter illusion, when we come to know the truth.

Whether the incipient foetus^b is the future being, both in its material and *immaterial* nature—whether the still-born infant is to pass into a state of life, and to reach maturity hereafter,—are questions of difficulty, if we consider futurity as the reward of conduct exemplified here, and happiness not as the necessary and ultimate effect of mere existence on earth, but as the *result* of trial and consequent and advancing purification. The matured infant just born into this existence, and the sinless child, have neither, when removed from it, had the means afforded of the discipline of the preparatory stage, and yet of such, (as the latter,) are we assured, is the kingdom of heaven. Nor may we doubt, whatever we determine as to the foetus in embryo, or the still-born infant, that, with the breath of this world's life, we inherit the spirit divine of another. The very motions of the infant body, and the eye, which conveys the images of external impressions to something within, indicate to demonstration the power—which has scarcely yet the means, through the medium of undeveloped organization—of evincing its being. If the opinion of Iamblicus be correct, that all our sins are the consequences of our connection with the body, the difficulties vanish ;

and we may conclude that the unpolluted soul will start from the incipient flesh here, into the fulness of the Spirit hereafter. Nay, if the reader rejects the hypothesis, which, we have endeavoured to shew, is fallacious,* that all our knowledge comes through the senses, we shall have no difficulty in concluding, that the mind of the infant body must, when relieved by death, expand into the manhood of spiritual being.† God certainly may have many ways unknown to us of reclaiming sinners, and of purifying humanity, without the discipline of this scene, or the benefits of Christian knowledge; nay, the most abandoned men have often become the most virtuous characters. David, the man after God's own heart, was once a murderer and an adulterer:‡ Augustus, after a youth of no ordinary criminality, closed a life of no ordinary virtue: St. Paul first persecuted Christians with inveterate hostility, then preached Christianity with invincible constancy: and the follower of Manes, in his youth the dissolute Augustine, became, in his riper years, one of the most distinguished ornaments of humanity. Nay, Origen, perhaps the most learned divine of ancient or modern days, when, in his controversy with Celsus, he justly remarks the extraordinary fact, not of philosophy reforming a few, but of the ignorant apostles of Jesus reclaiming the many from vice to virtue, adds as the inference,

* See Note m, p. 43, and pp. 145—147. † See Calmet's Dicty. vol. ii. p. 540.; Sherlock's Immortality of the Soul, p. 84.

that it is not only not impossible, but not difficult for corrupt nature to be changed by the power (or word) of God.* The fool and the madman who have stumbled through this life under an eclipse of reason, the incipient fœtus passing formless from the womb through death to the grave, the infant from the breast, and the child from the arms of its mother, must all and each go to their place of rest, appointed for them by the universal Parent of creation.

It has been considered altogether incredible that the devil should be ultimately reclaimed ; but the difficulty here, and the opinion resulting from it, arise, perhaps, out of our entire ignorance of the nature of the opposing principle, or of the manner in which it may be operated upon. The word *satan* or *devil*^a is, in fact, incomprehensible to us,—that is, we cannot here affix any intelligible or specific image or substantiality to our reasonings ; but it is clear thus far, “ that his power and malice are restrained within certain limits, and controlled by the will of God ;” that he (if I may personify) acts permissively of God, both in tempting the good and punishing the bad, yet is at enmity with God, and entirely in his power. We read of “ the body of sin,” without imagining or understanding by that expression that sin has a body ; so we may read of the wicked one or devil, without ascribing to the character, personification, or palpability, other than

* *Contra Celsum*, p. 153, 4to.

the natural passions and appetites, the evil will or purpose, resulting from the absence or the withdrawing of divine grace, which matures these passions and appetites into action, in a state of death, (as it is denominated by the Apostle,) in contradistinction to that regenerated state applicable to all created intelligence, when new doings, new affections, a new principle of life and of godliness, are infused into the natural or lapsed—but now regenerated or restored—creature, by the gradual operation of the Holy Spirit. Be this as it may, and be the evil principle what it may, as it confessedly acts permissively, the agency may and must be superseded when its inscrutable purposes are fulfilled. The inference—indubitable on the foot of reason alone—is confirmed beyond all controversy, when we consider that a God of eternal rectitude and uncontrollable power hath, in the highly-figurative language of Scripture to which we have before adverted, *sworn* that to him every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, of things on earth, and things under the earth.* When I consider these and similar passages—when I reflect, as Matthew expresses it,† that “heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,”—I cannot allow myself to doubt, (independently of natural convictions,) that the declared purposes and promises of an uncontrollable God shall ultimately be fulfilled. “As the waters cover the sea”—that

* See Is. xlv. 23.; Phil. ii. 10, 11.; Eph. i. 10. † Matt. xxiv. 35.

“ God’s law shall be put in men’s inward parts, and within their hearts,”*—although I see not the way of it, more especially when I contemplate the nature and inherent destructibility of evil ; to which I would now direct attention.

* See Jer. xxi. 33. ; Psal. xl. 8.

LETTER XXVI.

“ Our happiness in this life is thus upon many occasions dependent upon the humble hope and expectation of a life to come. * * * * It could never have been exposed to the derision of the scoffer, had not the distribution of rewards and punishments, which some of its most zealous asserters have taught us was to be made in that world to come, been too frequently in direct opposition to all our moral sentiments.”

Adam Smith.

“ ——— th’ inglorious common herd of man
Sail without compass, toil without a plan ;
In fortune’s varying storms, for ever tost,
Shadows pursue, that in pursuit are lost.”

J. H. Browne.

WE hear a great deal about eternity,—and some there may be, who imagine they understand what they mean by that awful and interminable duration ; yet were an eagle to endeavour to remove a mountain of sand by single grains, and were the time required for this gigantic labour extended by any conceivable multiple, still would this period, like a snow-flake falling on a shoreless ocean, be as nothing in the womb of infinity. Aye, and were one only

of the damned to enjoy the luxury of a tear of repentance in every thousand years, through the vast and unchanging revolutions of eternity, yet would this drop of woe produce a tide of sorrow sufficient to deluge the world. In the supposed abode of the accursed, (whither, we are required to conclude, the ubiquity of the Deity reaches,)* mercy, we are told, can have no place; there, the continuity of unmitigated agony is relieved by no note of time; and there, eternity is the never-ending hour which strikes on the ear of misery, and is sent back to the cries and the petitions of the wretched.

Be all this as it may, and be the reader's power of apprehending this scene of merciless retribution what it may, it is evident that eternity, in the sense in which we are now considering it,—that which never had a beginning, and cannot have an end,—can only be predicated of the Being, which was, and is, and ever shall be—"the one supreme Cause and Original of things"—"the one simple, uncompounded, undivided, intelligent Agent or Person, who is the alone Author of all being, and the Fountain of all power."† Eternity is inherent in God, the uncreated cause of all things. That which had a beginning must have an end; for wherever there is a first, there must of necessity be a last, unless it be a portion of the divine essence, and is necessarily sustained and penetrated by the

* Page 58.

† See Clarke, vol. 4. p. 122.

divine life. Moral evil and sin are altogether the result of the creature's liberty of choice—to will and to do. Sin assuredly is of man—salvation of God;* and evil had a beginning, later certainly than the creation of the visible world,—for God pronounced the whole “good,” and our first parents were created sinless, and after his image.^a Evil, then, indisputably had a beginning—a first, and it must consequently have an ending—a last; for it is not only not a portion of the divine essence, but is contrary to it—contrary to the uncreated Cause of all things, (sin excepted,) and cannot look upon God and live. God and sin are essentially opposites,—holiness and vice are inherently antagonists; and to say that the omnipotency of God shall not ultimately prevail over the obstinacy of sin, is purely to confound all distinctions. For, if we believe any thing, we must believe that God is happy, and void of all that is contrary to supreme happiness; but it is utterly impossible to believe this, and also to admit that his will and purpose are crossed in the ultimate happiness of his creatures, for this must inevitably produce uneasiness. The originating Cause of all may suffer the endurance of sin, (the liberty of choice in man,) as a means for the accomplishment of prepollent good; or it may necessarily arise out of a system of free agency, where motives imperfectly developed are the springs, and the actors are imperfect creatures;—but come

* See Or. Sac. vol. 2, p. 66—73, 4—80—101.

whence it will, or arise how it may, it is a creation necessary or accidental to imperfection, and must cease with the cause,—the imperfection—the error, if you will,—which produced it ; which, be it what it may, is certainly not of God, and which not being of God, nor produced by, although endured permissively of, God, must, like all other creations, and more than any creation emanating immediately from God, be temporal and finite.^b

Independently of the fallacy and impiety of attributing evil to the Almighty, it is purely absurd. Evil in its very nature is inherently destructible,—and there cannot be in the nature of things a principle essentially evil, and at the same time essentially eternal ; for evil is ever tending to destruction, and must ultimately sink under its own natural tendency. And it is a gratifying and conclusive evidence of the tendency and strength of moral worth,—of power, when directed by virtue, to prevail over power otherwise directed,—to observe, that in no one instance do we find a nation to have existed for any long period after the subversion of her virtue.^c

To insinuate an originating cause of pure evil, is pure extravagance, for then we could have no good thing here or hereafter. An originating principle partially evil is little less absurd ; for then the better being the stronger principle, must ultimately overcome the weaker—be purged of its partial imperfection, and live,—or perish eventually from the tactual contamination, (as all imperfection not to be

purified eventually, must.) Two originating infinitely perfect principles are inconceivable, for they must be substantially one and the same; and a supposed duality is nonsense, as explanatory of nothing, and contradictory, as commingling in unity. Two principles, equally poised, of evil and of good—equal powers in opposite directions, the one continually counteracting the other—is an hypothesis, in like manner, obviously untenable; for then the economy of the world must have stood still, which it has not, and there could be no God Almighty, yet something we must suppose superior to, because creative of, both, which is absurd. In short, whenever we ascribe evil in any shape to God, as the efficient cause, we must necessarily involve ourselves in the clouds and darkness of the most manifest contradiction. Evil or sin is clearly the result of imperfection,—nay, it is visibly so; it originated in the action of an imperfect creature, and it has accumulated ever since, in consequence either of that inherent imperfection consequent on such a created compound as man, or of the exercise of that freedom of will essential to him as an accountable creature.* If it be said that, under the first view of inherent peccability, one cannot be answerable for the imperfections of his nature, this, I answer, is merely begging the question—taking it for granted the infirmity was not poised or counterbalanced by inherent capability, in powers of controul and

* See Deut. xxx. 19.

resistance. In debating this matter, it is necessary to review the previous character. If we have permitted temptation and sin to make inroads on our moral constitution by repeated attacks, we are not to blame that constitution if it ultimately give way to a final and desperate charge; we are responsible for our previous trifling, and we must take the consequence. No man becomes wicked at once; ^d and no man will, I apprehend, succeed in obtaining the great victory of a controul over his passions and appetites, who admits, at any time, the slightest compromise with their incessant importunity and restless craving. The history of every good man—of every successful struggle against passion and appetite—proves the strength of the moral constitution; and the whole attributes of the Deity corroborate the inference of a communicated capability of resistance and control,—for to infer punishment for the act of an agent, controlled by inherent peccability uncontrollable, is manifestly ridiculous. I am quite aware that the reasoning here suggested is opposed by the specious yet fallacious adage—“That the cause of the cause, is the cause of the thing caused;” and Bayle asks, ^e if we maintain that man is the work of an infinitely holy and powerful Being, ought not the work of his hands to be—can it be otherwise than—good? and he puts, in illustration, the case of the mother who allowed the entreaties of the daughter to prevail in suffering her to go to a ball, notwithstanding the mother knew the daughter would in consequence

be seduced. Now, on this I remark, that the daughter here is tempted by the ball ; and we can just as easily account for the originating why—the overpowering temptation—in this case, as in that of Eve with the apple. Unquestionably an evil propension is permitted to assail us in this life of trial, otherwise it would not be what it is—preparative and corrective ; the why is to be found in the fact, that accountable beings must have the liberty of choice, which presupposes the existence of good and of evil to choose between. The latter is the necessary and unavoidable ingredient in all imperfection. To see a young woman, however, (although this reaches not the root of the charge against the original maker,) whose wisdom is not proof against the attraction of a ball, and whose virtue is not proof against the arts of a seducer, is neither a very rare nor a very unaccountable piece of frailty. With regard to the mother, the instance is perhaps somewhat complicated ; she is importuned, (tempted in like manner,) perhaps overcome, by the entreaties of her child. Now, all action in a reasonable being must proceed from some cause,—and the mother here either had some motive, or she had none. To suppose her to act from no motive, is either absurd, and therefore out of the pale of all argument,—or to pronounce her a fool, and her conduct equally beyond the province of reason and example. If, then, she was not overcome by the mere force of entreaty, like many a silly parent, she was operated on by the desperate wickedness of the human heart,

(when not counteracted by the controlling powers and communicated capabilities of reason and the moral sense,) in exposing the honour of a child that she might be dishonoured,—(a monstrous supposition, but still conceivable, and, I grieve to add, not without parallel,)—or she was imposed on, or won by some to her seeming advantages,—or, perhaps, the hope of a different result. The honour of her child, in short, was sacrificed to her weakness, or to her wickedness,—no very uncommon or unaccountable occurrence either. Be this as it may, the mother had the whole case before her—the going or not going to the ball—the being or not being seduced ; and from whatever cause of desperate wickedness or pre-eminent weakness, no man will deny that she was, as lawyers have it, *particeps criminis*,—for she could have prevented the consequences—for much immediate good, and without any prospective evil, resulting from the restraint put on the will of the daughter.

But what imputative analogy has this minute case of human wickedness or weakness—of which we have the whole disgusting subject in minute dissection before us, and which resolves itself purely into an act of vice or folly—of freedom of will on the part of an infirm creature—of a frail daughter of Eve,—to the conduct of the Almighty, (controlling myriads of worlds, and thousands of systems, not one of which we know even in part,) considered in relation to the existence of moral evil? Are we quite sure, in the plenitude of our survey, that it

was possible, under the view of man's ultimate destination, to avoid the partial evil of a preparatory stage? or, without producing greater confusion, and without introducing more deplorable consequences, could things have been otherwise? Let us reason the point. Is not the bare supposition of no evil in a state of preparation, inconceivable and contradictory?

Either man was to be accountable or not; and if accountable, to be gifted with reason, the use or abuse of which (as Cicero admirably observes ^f) must depend upon ourselves, and for which use or abuse we must, as reasonable and accountable creatures, expect, at any rate eventually, the necessary consequences of punishment or reward. And the point comes to be—whether it be possible even for Deity to frame an accountable being, who should not be obnoxious to temptation,—and if obnoxious, capable of falling: I say, clearly not. “It is consonant to reason to believe, (it is somewhere observed by Dr. Burton, I think,) that God gave to things which he had created a liability to become evil. The fallacy (adds he a little after) lies in supposing, *a priori*, that evil ought not to exist; whereas it is more philosophical to argue *a posteriori*, because evil does exist, that, therefore, it ought to exist.” Now, without admitting the legitimacy or infallibility of this *a posteriori* reasoning, ^g I would push the inference, in this instance, somewhat further, and say, not only that God gave to things a liability to become evil,—but that, since it was

clearly impossible for the Deity to create an imperfect creature without this tendency, it necessarily follows that this imperfection must naturally in so far be productive of evil, and the accountability resulting must as necessarily be restricted to the moral evil of the will, and cannot apply to the natural evil of the imperfection. The distinction is, we conceive, of the very essence of merit, and can only be known to the Searcher of hearts. If creatures were to be placed in a preparatory stage, there must, it is clear, be responsibility, where accountable creatures were to struggle,—and if responsibility, of consequence, risk,—and if risk, of consequence the necessary effect in corresponding measures of evil or of good. Why the Deity suffers this risk, is merely asking why the Deity has chosen to place us in a preparatory stage; or why evil is made or permitted to be a probable or possible consequence of our actions, or a necessary attendant of all imperfection,—is merely asking why we are imperfect creatures—why we are, in short, not infinite and perfect beings. We may condemn the plan altogether, without knowing more of it (as we do not comparatively) than a microscopic corner of a molehill, and, of consequence, without the possibility, if we had the faculties, (which we certainly have not,) to form a correct conclusion. But it is absurd to take it as we find it clearly is,—a preparatory stage for imperfect creatures to struggle onward to their eventual happiness, and then to complain that moral evil, sin, and

error, are (as they may, or rather must be) the result of man's actions ;—for this is to require free agency in an imperfect creature,—to direct him continually, or rather necessarily, to the choice of perfection—of good,—which is a manifest contradiction, and not to be effected by Deity itself. Evil is admitted by the Deity, because it is impossible, and could not have been proposed, not to entangle a system of trial and imperfection with such an effect ; it is not suffered or created for its own sake, but it is a necessary ingredient, which must pass away with the imperfection from which it results. A ball of light might just as reasonably be expected to emit darkness, as a stage of preparation, trial, and imperfection, to elicit only good. All evil, permitted or suffered, must, however, be necessarily limited, and all suffering, the result of evil, must consequently be transient. We admit that evil may be permitted or suffered, as the necessary means for the production of greater good ; but to maintain it to be necessarily eternal—which he must do, who contends that it is impossible for God to forgive any one sin—or that the most abandoned may not be reclaimed by the Almighty, is to give to sin the eternity necessary and essential only to that which never had a beginning—to declare the omnipotency of the Almighty Creator powerless against the apparent incorrigibility of the dependent creature—the goodness of a God of mercy and of love consistent with implacability and resentment—the evil of the will of created man inherently inconvertible by the power of the uncreated God.

LETTER XXVII.

“ A man thus occupied may, almost without a metaphor, be said to be actually placed rather as a distant spectator of terrestrial objects, than as one who has to act his part in contact with them ; so completely have such exercises a tendency to call forth all that is spiritual and exalted in our nature, and to extinguish every sentiment which is earthly and corporeal.”

Shuttleworth.

“ Go, let oblivion’s curtain fall
Upon the stage of man.”

Campbell.

IF it be contended that these imperfect lucubrations (now hastening to a close) convey no fixed and distinct views of an hereafter, I beg to remind the reader, that here we see through a glass darkly ; our optics are too weak for the undivided rays of glory, and our faculties too material for the pure converse of intelligence. Nay, did I, in my happiest hours of holy aspiration,—did I see, in my mind’s eye, a defined picture of the transporting scene ; or could I, in my warmest fancy, when the world and all its

cares seem shrunk in their dimensions before me,—could I picture in full perspective that blessed country,—I should, in my calmer moments, be compelled to distrust the illusion,—so totally beyond any finite powers must be the full outline of its glorious and boundless landscapes. The heavenly light, brought too near the sight of mortal weakness, dazzles but to confound in utter phrenzy the feeble sightless orb of dark and dismal humanity.

But it may be objected, that, as the great object of every man ought to be the promotion of human happiness and felicity, a heavier charge than that of obscurity may be levelled against these pages. It may be said, (by those only, however, as, it appears to us, who misunderstand or misinterpret our reasoning,) that the doctrine we advocate tends to loosen the bonds of society, and to give a licence and a liberty to the licentiousness of human passion. Be assured, “that no truth—no matter of fact—fairly laid open, can ever subvert true religion.”* If to believe in the existence of an all-wise and merciful Creator, of universal and uncontrollable benevolence, whose energy is in constant direction to the completion of ultimate happiness by the best possible means—in whom we live, and move, and have our being here, and must continue to have it hereafter—and from whom we derive every good and perfect gift both of time and of eternity,—if to believe that the Being who called man into ex-

* Lardner's Gos. His. Part 2d, vol. 2, p. 812.

istence in this wretched life, shall exalt his soul into his glorious presence to enjoy happiness hereafter, when fit to partake of it,—if to believe all this, leads to licentiousness, then do we plead guilty to the charge. And, we confess, we see not, in all the merciful dispensations of this Almighty Being, the ultimate damnation *of any living thing*; and we dismiss, as an abomination in his sight, that false religion, and that hollow reverence, and that calculating adoration, which is extorted (by the fear of coming retribution) from an unwilling mind, or wrung from a worldly heart. Religion is not a compromise of interest,—a question of expedient calculation,—or of value between this world and the next—between the Creator and the created,—a compensation to be obtained hereafter, or a punishment to be avoided, or a favour to be received, for the partial abandonment of our own selfishness, and for account of our interested services here;—but mindful

“of the crown that *virtue* gives,
After this mortal change, to her true servants,”

it is, emphatically, *every thing, or it is nothing*. It is the bond of universal brotherhood—the connecting link of universal charity—that ceaseless emotion of the contrite in heart—that silent breathing of the holy in thought, and that anxious aspiration of the devout in spirit, after “whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, and of good

report"—based on the love of God and of our neighbour, and the necessary attractions of a virtuous life—all resulting from our moral understanding, and founded on a just conception of the character,—a felt and abiding sense of the nature and benevolence, of the Deity, both in reference to the creation and future inheritance of man, and to the purposes, present and eventual, of his condition. If religion must be supported, on the ground of fear for evil—of suffering interminable misery, (the great lever of all false worship, and the mighty engine of all spiritual ascendancy,) we apprehend (independently of its superstitious influence) that nothing but a production of selfishness can be reared on such a basis,—a creature just such as we find man in general to be, whose very character is selfish, and whose whole bearing is thus formed by this detestable tendency—so utterly repugnant to the spirit of Christianity, and in all its details so entirely opposed, not only to the mission of Christ, but to the virtue and happiness of every stage of social existence. It is in vain to urge upon us, that the sublime motive of our inculcation is too refined^a—too excellent for the forbidding deformity of the human heart. This honourable objection may be levelled against the purity of Christianity, as it was against the noblest sect of ancient philosophy; and we do not deny this wayward propensity. We admit, in sorrow, this inveterate

* See Phil. iv. 8.

leaning ; but we are not, therefore, to set infirmity before us as the prototype for our imitation,—nay, we maintain that this deplorable tendency has been aggravated, and never can be eradicated, by the principles which are abroad among us, and fostered, by the baneful influence of false doctrine and falser practice, into such fearful maturity. No sane man can hope to be “perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect ;” no fanatic can expect to reach the peaceful sinlessness of Christ, and yet his unapproachable excellence is made the pattern for our imitation. The school of Zeno produced the most illustrious characters ; it gave to the heathen world Cato, and Brutus, and Antoninus—yet the good man of the Stoics is a visionary chimera, superior to Deity itself.^b “My thoughts (says the sublime Prophet Isaiah) are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways ;”—most strikingly is the opposition between man and his Maker here set forth ! Alas ! if revenge be the wild justice of the natural man, bruited forth in the yell of the savage, retribution to the hilt is still the same hungry cry of the human heart. Nothing is so incongruous to the vindictive passions of man as a God of omnipotent power, “who forgiveth iniquity.” It is, indeed, impossible, we conceive, for any man to look on the lovely nature of Christianity, as delivered in the Gospel of Jesus, and exhibited in his life, and not to feel ready to exclaim—“either this is not Christianity, or we are not Christians.” Now, true it is, as evidence can make it, that this is

Christianity ; and true it is, as experience can testify it, that we are *not* Christians. Nay, our Christianity, and the Christianity which has come down to us in the memoirs of Christ, as it was exhibited in his benevolent, sinless, yet suffering life, are at variance, both in precept and practice ;—the one calculated to form man for peace, and love, and affection, and to divest him of all selfish propensities ; the other addressing itself to his fears, naturally subordinates the love of Deity to the love of self, generating interested feeling and superstitious homage, and vainly proposes to kindle the hallowed fire of pure devotion to a God of love, on the altars of intolerance and terror, lengthening out into prospects of interminable endurance beyond death and the grave. ^c

“ The grave ! dread thing !
Men shiver when thou’rt nam’d.”

Yet if the greeting of death be severe—if his gripe be withering,—his silent hand emancipates^d the soul from the walls of her corruption, and bids the weary of a shuffling world be at rest ; for

“ ————— ’tis life’s last shore,
Where vanities are vain no more ;
Where all pursuits their goal attain,
And life is all retouch’d again.”

Still it is not in our weakness, we confess, to look on lifeless humanity without some emotion ; to behold the pallidity of the mindless countenance,

which once smiled on us, perhaps, with warm affection, or delighted us with rising intelligence ; to touch the icy coldness and the quiet heart of departed life ; to breathe the heavy silence and the sinking atmosphere of decaying mortality—the creeping unearthly effusion which surrounds the obstruction of the dead.* Yet if our creed be no fallacy, and if the Being whom we adore be indeed a God of all love and of all consolation, where is the victory of this grave ? where is the triumph of this death ? when we throw the living and immortal energy of the spirit out of the thralldom of an earthly tabernacle—burst the fetters of this bounded world—and, winging our way and our thoughts far beyond its feverish excitements and corroding cares, rest our hopes and our wishes with the Father of our spirits, and sit down in peace and security under the shadow of his uncontrollable Godhead.—Reader, this is the consummation to which we would direct you, and to which, we believe, true Christianity calls you. At the bidding of the Eternal you came into this uneasy world, ignorant and feeble, called out of nothing by the breath of his love ; and the gates of hell and of death cannot prevail against the power and the mercy of an almighty arm—bared, not against the frailty of the sinner, but against the heinousness of the sin. Yet away with the delusion, that any thing that defileth can enter into the rest of Jehovah—

* See the Giaour of Lord Byron, line 68.

that the leprosy of sin can be suffered to contaminate the kingdom of the Godhead. No: the sinner must be reclaimed, or he must be destroyed utterly, for an eternity of evil is a natural absurdity. If, then, the soul be immortal, all evil must be hereafter subdued,—for good and evil must ever be at variance,—and ere virtue and happiness cease to be triumphant, God himself must cease to be “all in all.” Turn, then, in instant prayer, from the pestilence of sin, to this God of your fathers, whose unchangeable goodness is the uniform brightness of one untroubled eternal lustre—who made, penetrates, and sustains you—whose anger can only be opposed to crime—whose love is ever with virtue—whose glory and whose felicity remain unaltered and unalterable, amidst the wreck of passing empires, and the crash of transitory worlds. Reader, what a picture for your imitation—what an object for your gratitude, for your love, for your adoration—to behold the goodness and the greatness of that Being who alone is immutable and eternal, who alone stands immoveable and independent of all creation, and who cannot receive returns from any object of his care,—still is he the liberal and unwearied Giver of every good, and perfect, and enduring gift! Gracious! merciful God! what a contrast does the universal benevolence of thy character present to the selfishness and tyranny of man!—how earnestly ought every one to labour in works of love and of charity, who desires to imitate the most adorable of all thy perfections,

who lives under a sense of thy presence—aspires to thy favour here, and hopes for thy glory hereafter !

“He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.” e

“ Like the Chaldean, he could watch the stars,
Till he had peopled them with beings bright
As their own beams ; and earth, and earth-born jars,
And human frailties, were forgotten quite :
Could he have kept his spirit to that flight,
He had been happy.”

LETTER XXVIII.

“ If I were to advise any man, who is resolved by his practice to contradict that opinion which he saith he hath of God, or that is not resolved to live with that reverence and usefulness due to the majesty of Almighty God, in whose presence he always is, I would counsel him not to believe himself, when he professes the omnipresence or omniscience of God.”

Chillingworth.

“ How bright my prospect shines ! how gloomy thine !
A trembling world ! a devouring God !
Earth but the shambles of Omnipotence.”

Young.

SUCH, then, are the reasons which induce the writer of these pages to look for the restoration of all things. Even in this troubled drama of incessant action, he sees, in every change of scene, much to lead him to forgive the errors and wickedness of man—everything to constrain him to expect mercy from the goodness and providence of God. How much error is abroad ! how much ignorance ! how many preju-

dices ! how many excitements ! how many allurements ! whose united influence in disturbing the moral bearing of a fallible creature, in this fleeting stage of things, He only can duly appreciate, who is not strict to mark the delinquencies of fallen man, and whose tender mercies are over all his works. The mild philosophy of the imperial Antoninus, the noblest Stoic of them all, teaches us, indeed, to return an injury by forgetting it ; but the blessed Gospel of the humble Jesus requires us, in the wide embrace of its more diffusive benevolence, to love all—to forgive all—to pray for all—to do good even to them that hate us. The doctrine of eternal punishment, grafted upon that consolatory Gospel, and tortured out of its redeeming mercy and boundless compassion, would have us believe, that the object of our commanded love, of our desired forgiveness, of our solicited prayers, is doomed by a merciful God to everlasting suffering. No : we can never believe so revolting a contradiction. The great Being alone who created the human soul, can make it happy or miserable,—can render it unutterably wretched while it remains incorrigible, and is separated from his presence, ^a—can pervade its inmost capacity by inconceivable bliss, when fit to partake of it, in the kingdom of his Zion. But virtue must ultimately prevail ;—a pillar of light, it stands immoveable amid the darkness of surrounding evil—beaming forth glory, expanding, and ultimately permeating universal space in the brightness of one uniform and immortal transpa-

rency. Yes: virtue is a substance which can never die—the very being and body^b of the Godhead. The dying Roman, after the crushing desolation of Philippi, in the bitter hour of his blighted hopes and expiring aspirations, might, in the agony of dissolution, exclaim, as he hastened his indignant soul from the coming glory of the Cæsar—that, on this earth, he had found it a shadowy name,—for *here*, indeed, it is an exile. But in the calm and holy heaven of Jehovah, it has a resting-place, it has a home,—it is *there*, the chosen of God—the glory of the Deity—the brilliant of his diadem. Can we then despair of the final triumph of virtue, when the Lord of heaven and of earth has honoured it by his choice—has perilled the power of his almighty arm to protect it—and has sworn from the throne of his omnipotence to defend it? Can we imagine that the madness of the spirit of puny man shall be suffered to deform the fair creation of Almighty God for ever; that the wisdom of Omniscience cannot unravel as effectually as the folly of ignorance can perplex; that iniquity shall ultimately be permitted to drag on an immortality of suffering, and jar in discords of burning agony, amid the harmony of love, the songs of joy, and the shouts of gladness, which shall fill the kingdoms of Jehovah—when the universe itself “rings jubilee”—teems with delighted and purified existence—and the mighty and sinless populations of eternity shall live in the visible presence, and “drink life, and light, and glory,” from the immediate aspect of an

eternal and omnipotent Godhead? No, we believe, not more in conformity to revelation than to reason, that the pains of this blighting earth are all preparatory—are all corrective.^c We believe that when the Redeeming Saviour shall have fulfilled the purposes of his divine commission, he will deliver up the delegated kingdom and the deputed power to the Father, who, in Scriptural language, shall then be “all in all”—bringing all things “out of darkness into his marvellous light,” and who is even now proceeding watchfully and unerringly in the great, final, and only intelligible purpose of his creation—the purity, happiness, and holiness, of the universality of intelligent being.^d We will bless the Lord, “who redeemeth our souls from destruction;” with Isaiah will we exclaim—“Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem,—for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God :”^e or, in the poetry of philosophy, as sung by her immortal bard, we ask—

“ Why was man so eminently rais’d
Amid the vast creation,—why ordain’d
Through life and death to dart his piercing eye,
With thoughts beyond the limit of his frame,—
But that the Omnipotent might send him forth,
In sight of mortal and immortal powers,
As on a boundless theatre, to run
The great career of justice ; to exalt

His generous aim to all diviner deeds ;
 To chase each partial purpose from his breast :
 And thro' the mists of passion and of sense,
 And thro' the tossing tide of chance and pain,
 To hold his course unfaltering ; while the voice
 Of truth and virtue, up the steep ascent
 Of nature, calls him to his high reward—
 The applauding smile of Heaven ?

* * * *

There 'his' hopes
 Rest at the fated goal. For, from the birth
 Of mortal man, the Sovran Maker said,
 That not in humble or in brief delight,
 Not in the fading echoes of renown,
 Power's purple robes, nor pleasure's flowery lap,
 The soul should find enjoyment : but from these
 Turning disdainful, to an equal good,
 Through all th' ascent of things enlarge her view,
 Till every bound at length should disappear,
 And *infinite perfection* close the scene."*

“O quam contempta res est homo, nisi supra humana se erexerit.”

* Akenside.



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